

# **BANDWAGON**

**THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.**

**SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2001**





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## THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2001

**FRED D. PFENING, JR. EDITOR AND PUBLISHER**

Joseph T. Bradbury, Associate Editor Emeritus

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Gunther Gabel-Williams is pictured with his favorite animal, Kenny the leopard.

The photo is courtesy of ©Feld Entertainment, Inc.

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This back cover of the courier was used by the Buffalo Bill Wild West in 1907. It is die cut in the shape of an Indian chief. It is from the Pfening Archives.

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The Frank A. Robbins newspaper ad on page 33 of the last issue is 1907 and not 1901. The photo of the Robbins family on page 37 includes son Milton and not Frank, Jr.

In the Harrington article the year of Harrington's death was omitted. He died on March 31, 1940.

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I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr, publisher. (10-2-01)

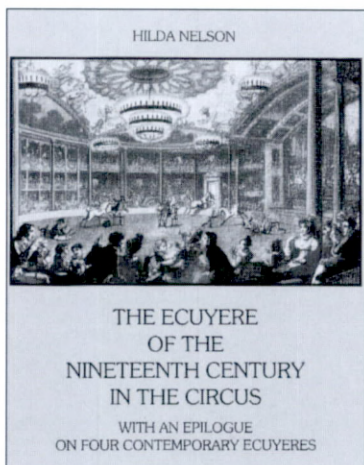
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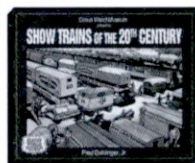
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# Gunther Gebel-Williams

## "The Lord Of The Rings"

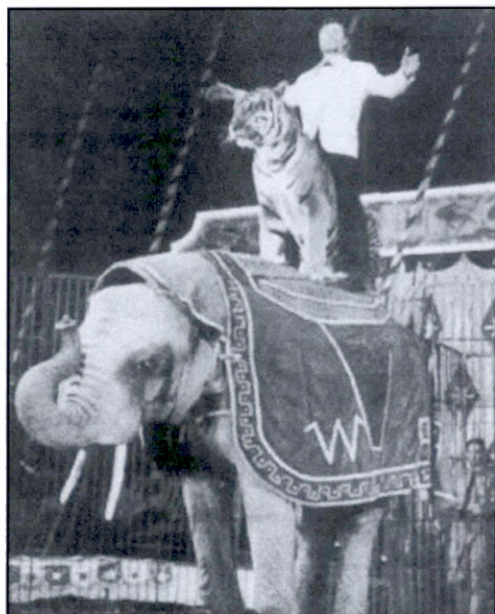
By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

Gunther Gebel was born on September 12, 1934 in Schweiditz, Germany, now a part of Poland. Gebel and his mother were living in near poverty after World War II. They journeyed to Cologne seeking a better life. Mrs. Gebel found work there sewing costumes for Circus Williams, one of Germany's larger circuses. His first job with the circus was as an usher. Little did he realize that he would later be known as "The Lord of the Rings."

Mrs. Gebel left the show placing young Gunther in the custody of show owners Harry and Carola Williams. Harry Williams took a great interest in sixteen-year-old Gunther and began grooming him as an acrobat and Roman rider.

In 1949 Harry Williams was unable to perform and Gunther stepped in as his replacement. By the Gunther was a featured performer

Gunther Gebel-Williams on Circus Williams in the middle 1960s. All photos courtesy of © Feld Entertainment, Inc.



working horses and elephants. While the Williams show was in England in 1951 Williams was thrown from a chariot and died a week later.

In 1952 Carola Williams invited Gunther to join her in the management of her circus. It was then that he added Williams to his name. By 1954, at age twenty, Gunther had perfected his animal training and was presenting horses, elephants and wild animals. During the next five years Gunther honed his skills as manager, trainer and performer.

On September 9, 1959 the author first saw Gebel perform in Berlin, Germany on Circus Williams.

He married the boss's daughter Jeanette in 1960. That year he trained and presented a new act featuring two tigers and two elephants.

Gunther was awarded the European circus world's highest honor, the Ernst Renke-Plaskett award, in 1964. He won this honor two more times, for his elephant act and as an outstanding all-around circus performer.

In 1969 Irvin Feld introduced a second unit of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth, using some of the equipment from the ill-fated European edition of the Ringling show. In search of a featured performer for the new unit Feld set his sights on Gunther Gebel-Williams, then a sensation of the European circus world. Gunther was very interested in coming to America, but felt a responsibility to Mrs. Williams. That was cured when Feld bought all of the Circus Williams animals that included thirty-eight horses, nine tigers and twelve elephants. By then he had divorced Jeanette and married Sigrid Newbauer. The miniature Noah's Ark docked in a New



Gebel as a teenager on Circus Williams.

Jersey port in November 1968.

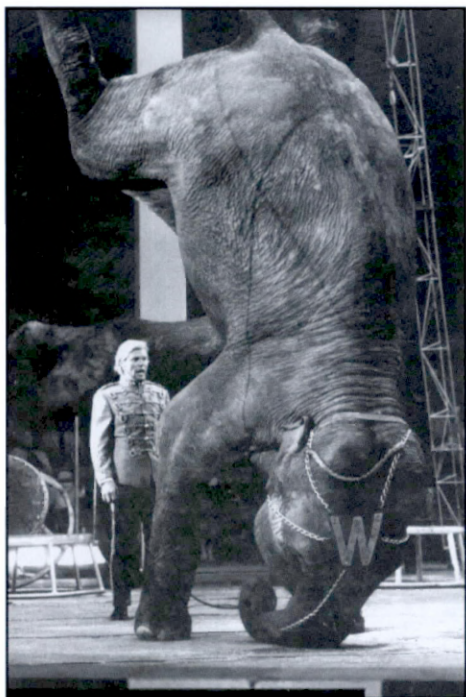
The 99th edition new show began its 1969 year on January 9 in the circus winter quarters in Venice, Florida. The performance featured Gunther Gebel-Williams, as an immediately sensation, although only 5 feet 4 inches tall, he quickly became an icon in the American circus world. He was destined to change the face of the circus in the United States.

In 1970 he introduced a new act with three tigers, two horses and an African elephant.

He trained and presented a number of new wild animal acts in the next few years.

In 1973 was selected by the American Guild of Variety Artists as the outstanding performer of the year. That season Gebel-Williams appeared in four acts, big tiger act, three tigers, two horses and an African elephant. Elephants on hip-





The Williams elephant headdress was used on Ringling in 1969.

podrome track responding to voice commands and the elephants in the ring. The same year he was featured in an in-depth profile in the *New York Times* magazine.

Although he had achieved stardom, he was a regular guy to the circus personnel, always pitching in on the grunt work of caring for his animals. He treated his fellow workers as equals. A circus worker said: He works right along with us. There's nobody like him."

The seven tiger act on Ringling in 1969.



Veteran clown Peggy Williams commented: "It's difficult to look at Gunther as a 'star' because he's so human. He never pulls rank. He never lets anybody down, his eyes see further than most people's. He could do any job, he's just the super-citizen of the circus."

In 1977 his new cage act consisted of three panthers, two pumas and fifteen leopards. A leopard named Kenny was feature of the act. Kenny, named after Kenneth Feld, was his favorite animal of all he worked with. That same year Gebel was featured in the CBS-TV network special, *Lord of the Rings*, with Tony Curtis. Gebel also appeared with Kenny in a TV commercial for American Express.

It was a proud moment in 1979 when he became a citizen of the United States.

He presented an act featuring a white tiger in 1980.

In 1981 Gebel appeared in a second nationally televised production on NBC-TV titled *My Father, the Circus King*, a behind-the-scenes look at Gebel through the eyes of his son, fifteen year old Mark Oliver. That same year he co-hosted a CBS-TV special with Richard Thomas.

He appeared as a guest on numerous national television shows, including a memorable visit with Johnny Carson on the *Tonight Show*, where Gebel brought along an elephant.

"Dickie" the trained giraffe was his new presentation in 1982, adding still another species to his training

accomplishments. In 1983 he appeared with Sugar Ray Leonard and his son on a CBS-TV special *Highlights of Ringling Bros, and Barnum & Bailey Circus*.

That same year his revolutionary training techniques and unique relationships with his animals made him the of a profile in *Psychology Today*.

He made an appearance in 1987 as a celebrity presenter at the the TV Emmy Awards.

The show published a coffee table



Gebel with Dickie the giraffe in the 111th edition.

book in 1988 titled *Lord Of The Rings*. It told of Gebel's life and was loaded with color photographs.

In the introduction to the book Kenneth Feld wrote: "To my father, Gunther was never an employee. Gunther was family. For twenty years, Gunther Gebel-Williams has been family. First to my father, then, to me, and now, to my three daughters.

"For twenty long years, he has stood by my side, offering silent support. Gunther and I have come through much together. Between us, there is a bond . . . a fierce loyalty and a mutual respect born of the same hopes and dreams for the love of ours called the Circus.

"With great admiration, I pay tribute to the career of Gunther Gebel-Williams, a living legend.





Kenneth Feld and Gunther at his retirement party in Pittsburgh. Fred Pfening photo.

"With great warmth in my heart, I pay tribute to Gunther Gebel-Williams: my friend."

During his final year of performing he was featured by Ringling working twenty-one elephants, thirty-eight horses, 22 tigers, four zebra and three camels.

After a lifetime in the circus Gunther began his farewell tour in 1989. After the two year run of the show concluded a farewell party was held after the final performance in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on November 18, 1990. In an emotional gesture Gebel turned his boots over to son Mark as a symbolic changing of the guard.

In 1994 Gebel served as the focus of a CBS-TV network special, *The Return of Gunther Gebel-Williams*. He was called into spotlight for a for a final time on September 27, 1998 in Grand Rapids, Michigan when he

Gebel and with an equestrian horse.



stepped into the tiger cage so that Mark Oliver could return to their Venice, Florida, home for the birth of Gunther's grandchild, Hunter.

In 1995 he was honored by Madison Square Garden for holding the record for most performances by any entertainer in the famous arena.

During his career with the Greatest Show on Earth Gunther appeared in 12,000 performances, 1,191 in Madison Square Garden, and never missed a show. In 1991

He was inducted in Sarasota's St. Armand Key's Circus Walk of Fame.

Although he did not again appear in the ring he continued with the Red Unit in his role as Vice-President of Animal Care. He supervised all of the animal acts and was always at ring side when his son Mark Oliver was working the tigers or elephants.

Kenneth Feld, recalled: "Gunther was unlike any performer anywhere. When he entered the circus arena, whether riding Roman Post on galloping horses or atop an elephant, every eye was always on him until he left the floor. Whether he was working with tigers, leopards, elephants, horses, or a giraffe, you immediately knew he was special, because his incredible rapport with animals was unsurpassed. Gunther knew the mind of the animal, and he taught us all to love and respect living things. He set a standard for performing which will be almost impossible to match."

Gebel considered Clyde Beatty as the best known wild animal presenter in modern circus history. However, he did not follow Beatty's style, never using a chair or pistol in

the big cage. He also worked a number of animals, including horses and elephants, as opposed to Beatty. Both Beatty and Gebel were the two most well known wild animal men of modern times. Beatty was a featured performer from 1930 until 1965. Gebel was featured for thirty years up to his

retirement from the ring in 1969. In an eerie coincidence both Beatty and Gebel died of cancer on the same day, July 19th.

While the circus was in San Antonio, Texas in 2000 he became ill. It was determined he had brain tumor. His family considered surgery in Houston, but decided to return to Sarasota for the operation, which took place on July 3.

He spent the rest of the year recovering under his daughter's care. Early in 2001 he was on and off the show, usually in the background, wearing a black baseball cap to cover the loss of hair due to on-going treatment. In the spring of 2001 he had further surgery. This affected his already poor eye sight.

The author had a short conversation with him during the 2001 Madison Square Garden engagement. He was failing and soon returned to his home in Venice, Florida. Gunther Gebel died on July 19, at his home.

A memorial service was held on July 24 at 5 p. m. in Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church about a mile from Gebel's home. Around 1,700 people were in attendance. Keith Green and some of the band were there. Eric Michael Gillett, the singing ringmaster, who was ringmaster the last time Gebel performed, sang *Amazing Grace* acappella. A priest introduced the Venice mayor who announced a resolution the city council passed about Gebel. Kenneth Feld spoke in a moving way for about twenty-five minutes about his friend. Feld was nineteen when he met Gebel. Dr. Richard Houck, the vet, told how concerned he was about his animals. The band then played some moving pieces and Gillett sang again. On a large video screen in the center of the altar a short biography of Gebel was shown. The priest blessed the casket. The pall bearers lead it out of the church while Gillett sang *You'll Never Walk Alone*. The surviving family, wife Sigrid, son Mark and daughter Tina Del Moral, then went a private mass.

Contributions in his memory can be made to Gunther Gebel-Williams Foundation, P. O. Box 3500, Falls Church, Virginia 22043-3500.



# A 1973 ART CONCELLO Interview With

By Tom Parkinson

Parkinson: You started to go to the YMCA, and somebody there figured you ought to work out with the Wards, or work out in the Y, at that point. Then you went on the road with the Wards. Was this Hagenbeck-Wallace?

Concello: Yeah. I went with the Hagenbeck-Wallace show in 1927.

Parkinson: Okay. And was it with an act with Eddie Ward?

Concello: No, Eddie Ward himself was with the Floto show.

Parkinson: And who was in your act?

Concello: A guy named Jimmy Arbaugh, Ellie Ward, Herb Fleming.

Parkinson: And it was called?

Concello: The Flying Wards. In them days, Eddie Ward furnished the acts for the Corporation shows.

Parkinson: So he probably had, what, three at least?

Concello: Yeah. He had an act with the Hagenbeck show, one with

Concello, at right, with Flying Wards in 1927. Illinois State University collection.



Concello as a teenager. Illinois State University collection.

SSS Sells-Floto, and one with the John Robinson.

Parkinson: When you were on that show, was Danny Odom the manager at that time?

Concello: Danny Odom was the manager, that's right.

Parkinson: He was a little bit of a rough guy to work for?

Concello: Well, yes, he was a rough, tough guy, old Danny.

Parkinson: Did you have any particular run-ins with him? Who was the manager of the act?

Concello: Jimmy Arbaugh.

Parkinson: So he'd have the heat up there.

Concello: I never had any trouble with Danny at all.

Parkinson: Then the next year you switched to the Floto show?

Concello: 1928? In 1927, I went with the Hagenbeck show. In 1928, I opened with the Floto show, then I went to the John Robinson show.

Parkinson: Was this your changing from one Ward act to another?

Was that about the size of it?

Concello: No. I just worked for Eddie Ward and you just went wherever he sent you. I got an act with the Hagenbeck show. So, I went with the John Robinson show in 1928, and in 1929 I went with the Floto show. [Zack] Terrell was there.

Parkinson: Well, you got introduced to all of them. Was Sam Dill on the Robinson show when you were there?

Concello: Yeah, and a guy named Cook.

Parkinson: Frank Cook?

Concello: Yeah.

Parkinson: Any particular incidents come to mind on those things?

Concello: Nope.

Parkinson: What kind of a turn in the act were you doing then? What was your top trick at that point?

Concello: Oh, I did a double, a two and a half, passing leap.

The Flying Wards in 1928. Wayne Larey, Frances Reiner, Art Concello, Antoinette Concello and Eileen Larey. Art Brown collection.





Parkinson: Okay. When you went to the Floto show, this is still with the Wards and Terrell was there, you got introduced to Zack--and who would be the equestrian director?

Concello: Fred Ledgett.

Parkinson: Was he a pretty good equestrian director?

Concello: He seemed to be a pretty good old guy.

Parkinson: Was it pretty much fun trouping in those days?

Concello: Jesus Christ, everything's fun when you're eighteen.

Parkinson: Well, I think it was in the 1929 season, you would have been there when you heard that John Ringling bought them all. What was your reaction to that? What was the reaction on the show, generally? Were people excited about it?

Concello: Naw, there wasn't too much reaction. I think he bought the show and there was talk around about it, but that was about all. Of course, like every place else, the said, "Oh, everything will be just the same as it's always been."

Parkinson: And then the changes started coming.

Concello: That's right.

Parkinson: Well, now, that next season I think you were with Fred Buchanan.

Concello: Yeah. I went with Fred Buchanan in 1930.

Parkinson: Was that with your own act?

Concello: Yeah. I did my own act. Eddie had died along in there, in 1928 or 1929.

Mayme had the act there with one of the shows. And then in 1930, Fred Buchanan come over and I went with him in the spring. He opened up in a little town in Iowa, and I was with him until about June or July. I think he came east. I don't think he was used to coming east, and I think he cut the show down. About this time, Terrell said, "Jeez, we need an act with the Floto show." Something happened, anyway, until June or July, Buchanan was cutting down the show, I said I would get away from here, and I went from the Buchanan show to the Floto show in June or July and finished the season in 1930.

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Letterhead used by Concello in 1932. George Valentine is pictured with Art and Antoinette. Pfening Archives.

Parkinson: When you were with Fred, he must have been a tough old guy?

Concello: I liked him.

Parkinson: Well, I would have liked him. I was with George Christy recently, talking to George for a long time, and he chuckled about Fred Buchanan and said, "There was an old rascal," and this kind of thing. So it must have been kind of rough around the Robinson show for two reasons: one, you had the grift and, two, you had the depression.

Concello: Yeah. As far as I was concerned--I did the act. He liked me and I did the act, and he wasn't used

Art, Everett White and Antoinette on Ringling-Barnum around 1931. Pfening Archives.



to having flying acts around the show, and I had a stateroom with the show and I went on and took care of my own business. I was there from April until June or July, and I never had any trouble. They had the grift around there

and they had . . . in fact, Kenneth Waite, Molly Moon, and Peggy Cool, and all them queens was around there, but I never had any problems around there, until he said, "Gee, things are tough and I ain't doing much business, I'm going to cut down the show." I said, "Fred, you ain't got any problem, I got a chance to go to the Floto show." So I went right from there over to the Floto show.

Parkinson: I've heard of that connection, that he . . . well, the way I heard it was that he cut down the poles; now really he probably just started using the menagerie for a big top, or something like that, didn't he?

Concello: I don't know. He talked to me about cutting down the show; and I said, "Fine, if you're going to cut down and have a little show, I can't get up in there, and it's the best thing that I get away from here and it won't cost you any money." He said that that would be perfect. Now, the show wasn't cut down when I left because Terrell said he needed an act, and I said, "All right, I'll come over there, when do you want me?" He said, "Come on over the first of July," or whenever the date was. So I went over to the Floto show and I never seen it when it was cut down. I just took my stuff and went to the Floto show and finished the season there with Terrell.

Parkinson: Was Tom Mix still there?

Concello: Yeah, yeah; Tom was there. I finished the season with the Floto show and then Pat Valdo come around and said, "Hey, he wants you to go with the Ringling show." I had a contract with the Floto show, and I said, "Hell, I don't want to go with the Ringling show." Anyway, I wound up going with the Ringling show the next year.

Parkinson: In the program booklet, the little booklet things of 1931, your



act is listed in both . . . the copies I've got, at least . . . it's listed in both Sells-Floto and Ringling. Is there something you recall about Valdo deciding that maybe the Floto show wasn't going to last?

Concello: I don't know. He come over there and says, "Hey, I want to take you to the Ringling show." And I says, "Well, that's all right. I want more money." He says, "Oh my God, you've got a contract." I says, "All right, I'll go back to the Floto show." Anyway, that rassled around, and I got a little more money and I went with the Ringling show, I think that was 1931. I went with the Ringling show in 1931, and probably I had a contract to go with the Floto show in 1931. Probably Jake (Dillman/Newman?) or somebody just made the program up.

Parkinson: You never did open with the Floto show?

Concello: No, no. I left the Floto show at the end of 1930 and in the spring of 1931, I went to the Ringling show. Because I used to go for Orrin [Davenport] as soon as them shows would close, I'd play for Orrin in Detroit and them dates; and then I'd close just before the Garden and go to the Garden. So in 1931 I went to the Garden.

Parkinson: Now that was your first time in there?

Concello: Yeah, that was my first time in the Garden.

Parkinson: Did the act go on about the same? You were going to add a triple pretty soon, but you don't do that at that point, do you, you wait a little bit.

Concello: Yes, after that.

Parkinson: So in 1931, you're in the Garden.

Concello: I'm there in 1931 until 1942.

Parkinson: Now along that way, Alfredo Codona pulled his shoulder.

Concello: Alfredo was all right in 1931, and then he got hurt the next season . . . in 1932, I think it was he got hurt and then, well, the act was around that year, but he was out after that.

Parkinson: When did you take over the center ring?

Concello: Oh, I'd say about



Ringling-Barnum 1935 poster featuring the Concellos. Pfening Archives.

1933. I think he got hurt in 1932 and the next year I took over the center ring; and then at that point I furnished them all the acts. I furnished them three acts with Ringling.

Parkinson: How soon did you get to that point? How soon did you . . .

Concello: In 1934, I think. In 1934, I furnished them all the acts.

Parkinson: Now, when did you start the triple?

Concello: Oh, I did the triple, I guess, in 1934 or 1935, along in there.

Parkinson: Now, really, you've got a pretty good idea when you started

Parkinson: You're doing the three

Two of Concello's flying acts on the big show around 1935. Pfening Archives.



acts on that Ringling show, was Gumpertz in charge then?

Concello: Yeah, when I went there, Gumpertz was in charge. He was in charge of the show until 1938.

Parkinson: Then you made your arrangements with Gumpertz to sell him three acts?

Concello: With Pat Valdo. Gumpertz never did anything.

Parkinson: Now you also started furnishing them on the Hagenbeck show.

Concello: Yeah, I furnished them. I made arrangements with Pat, I said, "All right, I'll furnish the acts for all the shows." So I furnished them flying acts for all the shows in them days, plus I did a couple of bar acts and diving acts. I furnished them a number of acts from that point on until 1942 or 1943.

Parkinson: Do you recall the first time you had stuff on the Hagenbeck or the Barnes show? When you branched out beyond Ringling?

Concello: I'd say about 1934 or 1935, right in that period; I did acts for both shows.

Parkinson: At that time, of course, you knew all the flyers in the business and you'd go out and hire those fellows. Did you hire individuals or did you buy up acts?

Concello: No, I usually hired individuals and put the acts together, because I put them together and said, "Here." Ward's acts mostly broke up after Eddie died, a few years they kind of went to Hell. So, I knew all the flyers in the business and just hired the guys and take two or three and put an act together, make up some wardrobe, and say, "Here, let's go."

Parkinson: When you had that market and had the acts, you were hiring so many guys, did the price go up?

Concello: No, the price went up with the show, but the price of flying acts was a standard--a guy got a salary, and I got a good fee for them all, after I got organized. At that point, they didn't want to bother. They said, "Hey, we want an act with Hagenbeck." I'd say, "How many people? Four? All right, you've got it. It's gonna cost you so much money." At that



point, I'd get it together, get all the stuff and get it ready in Bloomington and send it to the coast, or wherever it was going, Hagenbeck or New York, or wherever it was going. I had the place . . . at that time I owned Ward's barn.

Parkinson: I'd like to get back to that. When did you buy that?

Concello: At about that time, about 1933 or 1934.

Parkinson: And you always called that The Farm, didn't you? You were going back to the farm.

Concello: Yeah. So I had a place to get these guys together and ready; and at the same time I was furnishing Wirth in Australia, too. I furnished acts for them for a long time.

Parkinson: Wayne Larey?

Concello: Yeah. I first sent Red Slater and Billy Ward over there in the early days, and later on I sent Wayne Larey and three or four people over there. I sent different people over there over the years. Wirth would just say, "I need a three or four people act," and three or four years later he would say he wanted to change it, so I would send him a new act.

Parkinson: What's the biggest number of acts you had in those days?

Concello: Oh, I think I had three with Ringling one time, two with Hagenbeck, one with Barnes, one at [a fair]; oh, about eight at one time--seven or eight acts I had flying acts.

Parkinson: Wayne Larey is the head of the Ringling show now, hay and grain detective, and he recalls that being around Bloomington and talks about they would assign each act an hour during the day. They'd rehearse all day; they had enough acts to fill up the day, and he was kind of the yard master on it.

Concello: Yeah. He used Wayne a lot and Tuffy Genders, and they'd practice an hour a day when we was busy, and I had eight acts and I'd just say, "Hey, you gotta go now and assign them times. Wayne was out there part of the time, and Genders was out there part of the time. So you'd practice them, get them in shape and see where you were going put different people and put them together and say, "All right, it's ready." So Wayne did a lot of that.

Parkinson: Now, so far as your own work is concerned--you were still working in the acts at that time.

Concello: I worked in the act until 1942.

Parkinson: Antoinette started doing a triple in 1937. You had his and her's triples about then?

Concello: I guess 1936, 1937, or 1938, along in there some wheres.

Parkinson: Now, let's put you on the Ringling show in 1938 when they had the trouble in Scranton--they had the strike. You were on deck for that, were you?

Concello: Yeah, I'm around there. I'm with the show when they had the strike in Scranton. They were going to close it up. So I'm friendly with John North, so he sent a message to come on down to the hotel. So I went down to the hotel, and he said they were going to take out another circus. He didn't know what the hell--Al G. Barnes or Ringling, whatever it was. He said, "Don't go no place, I'm going to take you with me." I gotta go to Sarasota and at that point he said, "Don't do anything. I'll take you over with the Barnes show." So I went--it closed up in Scranton and came down to Sarasota--then the Barnes thing opened--they was open and operating but they enlarged the Barnes thing.

Parkinson: And took 25 cars to Redfield, South Dakota. Concello: That's it. They went out to South Dakota and I went with that thing the rest of the year.

Art and Antoinette Concello in 1944. Pfening Archives.

Parkinson: And I saw you in Decatur, as I'd been seeing you in Bloomington and a few other places along the way. Well, everybody must have been pretty worried at that time. I guess it was quite a thing when the Barnes show came in there. They didn't know you were going to be there, and Paul Eagles and some of those guys told me about you arriving on the scene.

Concello: Yeah, they was all upset; except I had an act with the Barnes show then, except they enlarged it, so then I said that I would do two acts

with the Barnes show. So I went there for that year. I think we took Frank Buck, he was there and they enlarged it and took the Ringling top with the 25 cars, and the Barnes stuff they shipped away.

Parkinson: I guess they went down to Peru, probably. Now, in this period, too, just before the strike, John North came on the scene. Gumpertz is out and North is in. What is your first recollection of John? When did you first get in contact with him?

Concello: Johnny I knew from time to time he'd come around the show, so I knew Johnny from the time when he'd be around the show during 1931 until 1938. I knew North, and when he come around the show, he told me, "Well, I've made arrangements to . . ." He borrowed a million dollars off of Harvey Gibson of Manufacturer's Trust, and he paid off Gumpertz's interest.

Parkinson: Do you recall a Gumpertz thing; now they had two or three names of companies. (Strauss). was this Gumpertz's connection?

Concello: They put Gumpertz in.

Parkinson: Were there not two names there, Allied and something else?

Concello: Yeah, there was a banking firm that John Ringling borrowed some money from.

Parkinson: Yes, but I can't get straight in my mind how they switched those names; he'd borrow from somebody and then it turns out that maybe two other groups bought the note, or something.

Concello: They switched the paper around in New York anyway. Gumpertz was friendly with the banks or companies, that had loaned Uncle John the money. So they says, "Hell with you, Uncle John, we're going to put in a man to see that we get our count." So at that point, Gumpertz was in there in the 1930's until 1938. At that point, John North borrowed the money from Manufacturer's Trust and paid them off. So he come in





1937, sometime in 1937 and he come around the show. So I knew John, he was friendly. I was doing an act with the show. So I'd do the acts with the show and he'd come around and change some things. So then he had problems in 1938 when he had the strike. So he went out to Redfield and did this Barnes thing, and at that point in 1939 they went back to Ringling.

Parkinson: In that period you were still pretty busy with the act and hadn't really gotten into management until maybe 1942, but you had your eye on it a long time in there.

When did you first start deciding that... well, they tell it that you're up on that fly bar and you're counting the house.

Concello: Well, I nosed all around and I knew all about the show from the years as as a performer I was interested in the physical end. So in 1938, North had to put up a bond for fifty grand, he didn't have the money, so I put up the fifty grand.

Parkinson: That early! I knew you came into that.

Concello: In 1938, he needed some bond money, so I advanced him some money. So from '38 on, I was friendly with North.

Parkinson: What kind of a bond was that, just a . . . .

Concello: Oh, some kind of a performance bond, he needed the money for. I loaned him the money. I told him, "I'll loan you the money and you pay it back when you can." So he paid it back, no problem about it. Then in '39, he did the Ringling show again.

Parkinson: The bond was on the Ringling show, not Barnes Sells-Floto.

Concello: No, the bond was on him. Some type of a bond on him. So I advanced him the money. At that time he didn't have any money. In '39, things seemed to work all right and in '40, he did the Ringling show.

Parkinson: You're still flying then, but you're taking more and more interest in the management of it. You're close to John through this business.

Concello: Yeah. And he started. . . he wanted to get away from the horses, so I helped him go to the tractors, which

everybody said wouldn't work, but they finally worked some way or another.

Parkinson: What was your part in that?

Concello: Not too much. He asked me, "What do you think? We've got three hundred head of horses around here, and from the time the show closes until the show opens, you know I got to feed those S.O.B.s, and they sit in Sarasota--all them baggage horses that pull them wagons."

Parkinson: You've got to haul all that hay from the north somewhere.

Concello: We shipped it down there by the train load. I said, "Damn, it don't make much sense, does it? If there was something down there, you could lease them out." No, they set right in them quarters, three hundred head. So I said to North, "The damn army moves all these heavy ammunition wagons and everything else with Caterpillar tractors."

We ought to think about getting some tractors, and see if you can't eliminate those horses; and when you close, you can set them tractors over there and say, 'sit there now until I want you again,' and it ain't gonna cost you a nickel. You might have to fix them up a little or something, but it ain't gonna eat every day." So that was the situation how the Caterpillar tractors come in. I recommended using Caterpillar tractors instead of the three hundred head of baggage stock.

Parkinson: In that same period, they had maybe some trouble with baggage stock drivers.

Concello: They did. That's another reason.

Concello did away with the baggage horses, replacing them with Caterpillar tractors. Pfening Archives.



Parkinson: But both reasons figured in it, right?

Concello: Sure, both reasons figured in. You had three hundred head of horses and you could do the same job with ten Caterpillar tractors.

Parkinson: What did they do with all those horses? Who bought three hundred horses?

Concello: They sold them to some horse dealers. Horse dealers come down from here and there and they sold them all.

Parkinson: Well, I guess this about covers it for 1940 and 1941. And now, Buddy North tells the story in his book about the train going to New York for 1942, and the idea there is that they decided on the train they had to change general managers. Is that really when they did it?

Concello: Yeah.

Parkinson: Of course, George [Smith] had been having some problems, so they got to find some. . . is that the primary reason, his problems?

Concello: Well, the show was in winter quarters here so I had all the acts with the show and I used to be around here and there, in the front and all over. When they were loading up at night, for years, I used to be down there and knew all the bosses and knew where everything went, and everything. Anyway, they had a problem with George, and dammit, he's a good man and everything, and he just commenced to get drunk. Some guys could drink a quart a day and you'd never know it, but George would fall down. So on the train going up, I was on the train and Henry was on the train. And, of course, George proceeded to get drunk. . . don't quote me on this, quote somebody else.

Parkinson: Let me assure on all of this, Art, that I'm looking for the positive sides of these things, I'm not trying to upset any apple carts.

Concello: Cause, me, I didn't give a damn. I was making three times as much money as Smith with the acts, it wasn't a money thing. But they come to me and says, "Hey." I'm on the train going up and Henry's on the train going up, and



George is dead drunk, falling down and raising hell, and this and that and the other thing. Anyway, we get to New York and John North and Henry called me in says, "Hey, we've got a problem." I said, "Have you? I ain't, everything I got is mine." He says, "That's all right. Can you unload the train and get it in the Garden?"

I said, "S\_\_\_, that ain't no problem. You got the trainmaster and all the guys." So, anyway, they called George in and says, "Hey, you can't do anything, can't go anyplace this year." "It's your problem," I said, "you get it up, get it set, get it down;" so in 1942 I said, "What are you going to pay me?" They said, "We'll talk." I said, "Don't talk about it; tell me something. I don't want to do this G.D. thing unless you're gonna pay me." So, anyway, we agreed on a salary and I said, "All right, we'll turn the show over to you and you operate it and entertain all the soldiers and these people, and you turn it back to us in A-1 shape when you turn it back to us. We'll furnish you the people to operate the show and what have you, except we'll turn it over to you and you do what you want." 19 Which I thought was a hell of a good idea, because you couldn't get anyone. Anyway, they told him to go jump in the river; they fired him in '42--this is the end of 1942, this all happened.

Parkinson: You're really involved in the '43 season, I guess.

Concello: This happened in January, 1943. We were rasslin' back and forth in the month of December and January; this all happened in December and January 1943. So, he's fired. At this point, I'm fired. They said, "Oh, hell, we don't need you." However, I furnished all the acts, I've got a contract for all the acts for 1942.

Parkinson: Let's touch on one point there. Earlier you were furnishing just the flying acts. Now, when did you start furnishing everything?

Concello: Oh, I furnished the flying acts, three flying acts; a couple of aerial bar acts, and I had a comedy diving act where they dove into a net.

Parkinson: So you're still doing that same thing, then? You're not the agent for all the acts?

Concello: No, no, no. And I got about ten or fifteen gals that do webs, little girl numbers and cloud swings. I'm furnishing ten or twelve acts that are on the show. Aerial stuff; aerial bars, flying acts, girl acts, double traps and all the aerial stuff. I had nothing to do with the acts that John had hired.

Parkinson: Earlier Hamid had been agent for a lot of that stuff.

Concello: No, a guy named Bedini, Umberto Bedini. He was a guy that furnished most of this stuff. And Pat Valdo went to Europe and got a lot of this stuff, but John's man was Umberto Bedini. He got the acts together--European stuff. So anyway, at the end of 1942, December-January 1st, I'm fired. Now, I'm with the show, what have you, I ain't got nothing to do with it; I got the acts there and what have you.

Parkinson: You were actually on the show?

Concello: Well, I wasn't on it all the time--off and on. I wasn't working in the act, I furnished thirty or forty people, or whatever I had with the show. So I said, "Okay, fine." So this is 1942, and I'm off and on the show in 1942. Then 1943 comes along and I buy a thing called Russell Brothers.

Parkinson: Well, let's dwell on that one for a minute. Claude and Pauline Webb.

Claude's not feeling too well, he's got some in-laws and outlaws running the show for him, and he starts to look around for a buyer. As I recall, it was Jake Newman that maybe Pauline Webb contacted and she thought maybe he could get Zack Terrell interested in this. But,

The Beatty-Russell ticket wagon. Pfening Archives.



instead, he figured he had a better idea and he contacted you. Now, there's a couple of stories there that may be legend and may be fact, but one is: did you see the show before you bought it?

Concello: Yeah, I had seen the Russell show off and on--four or five times I had seen the show.

Parkinson: That was a pretty nice show at that time.

Concello: Yeah, then I went to the coast at this point. I talked to Jake and he said the Russell show was for sale and Webb is sick, so I said I'd go have a look at it. I had a guy named Red Larkin drive me out to the coast and I looked the show over on a lot in Los Angeles, looked it over two or three times and said, "What do you want for it?" He said, "I'll take 50 G's, as is, where is." I says, "You pay all the present bills. I don't want to be liable for any bills or any tax bills." So I bought the show in 1943 and run it.

Parkinson: Now you opened the season with it.

Concello: No, I bought it right after it opened, right at Los Angeles.

Parkinson: And you rented or leased the title from Webb, in a separate deal.

Concello: No, I had an agreement with Webb that I could use the title. I said, "I'll buy the show, I'm buying the title and goodwill, and what have you; the physical assets and the title." So he said that was all right. Now that wasn't in the sales contract, but I had a letter from him. Later on, she (Pauline) said, "Well, you didn't buy the title."

Parkinson: Oh, I see, there might be an argument.

Concello: She said, "I don't want to sell the title." I said, "Go screw yourself, get another buyer. Old C.W. give me a letter to that title. I might use it a year, I might use it two years, I might use it five years; if I ain't using it, I'll give it to you. I don't give a damn about Russell Brothers." So, anyway, I bought that and I ran up the coast in 1943.

Parkinson: Going up the coast now, there's another one of these legends that's following you around. How fast did you get that money back?

Concello: Immediately!



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in Grand Island, Nebraska or someplace, so I went down and visited with Goodall and we closed it up the first of November someplace in Texas.

Parkinson: And that season was as good as the first one with the Russell show?

Concello: Twice as good.

Parkinson: That sounds like it was REAL good. You closed it in Texas somewhere.

Concello: Now we wintered . . . I just said, "The hell with it, just set that thing right there and told Tupper to go get the Los Angeles lot. We'll play out to it." So I think in 1945 I put it on rails.

Parkinson: Okay, so the Beckmann & Gerrety stuff is in Shreveport.

Concello: So I said, "All right, take this crap over to Shreveport, all this damn junk you got here."

Parkinson: From where, Art?

Concello: Oh, we closed over there in some little Texas town in the east Texas area; and I said, "Tupper, get a winter quarters." He says, "Beckmann & Gerrety's got one down in Shreveport." I said, "Hell, that's all right, we'll winter there, too." So I talked to Barney [Gerrety] and asked how much he wanted for the flats . . . so I bought some flats and coaches and crap from Barney.

Parkinson: About fifteen cars?

Concello: Fifteen cars, yes. So we framed it and took all those damn trucks, and what I couldn't use, I sold. I had a guy named Wallace Lovett, and I said, "Wallace, sell that crap for anything you can get for it." So he sold it down there.

Parkinson: You kept some Russell trucks and you used some Beckmann & Gerrety wagons.

Concello: Yeah, what made sense I kept of the Russell stuff, and then Barney had a lot of crap there and I said, "I want this, and this that I picked out. How much do you want?" So he made me a deal and I bought it cheap and we framed the show and went on.

Parkinson: Okay. You framed it at Shreveport and then did you dead-head it to the coast?

Concello: No, we played on the way.

Parkinson: And then you called it

"Russell Bros. Pan Pacific," and you went to the Pan Pacific Auditorium. What was the idea or value of calling it "Pan Pacific?" Was it primarily Los Angeles area you played?

Concello: Naw, we just wanted the damned . . . I think we had Russell Bros. Clyde Beatty, and so we seen the boys out there and said we were going to call it "Pan Pacific."

We saw the guys who had the building, Henderson Bros., we were gonna open there anyway, and they said it was all right with them. So we called it "Russell Bros. Pan



A rehashed Russell poster with Concello flying act. Pfening Archives.

Pacific." So we run that season.

Parkinson: Before you get too far ahead now, let's get back to Arthur Bros. When you were up around Spokane in 1944, you had some pretty rough opposition, day to day opposition kind of thing with . . . was it Paul Eagles who was their agent at that point and didn't you have some opposition with them?

Concello: We had some trouble with Arthur Bros. after we got. . . we was, I think in them days we played the Los Angeles lots for twenty-four or twenty-five weeks and we played San Diego. In other words, we played two or three months around San Diego, Los Angeles, and that area. Well, there was this thing . . . a guy had a little old trap called Arthur Bros. and they run up ahead of us up the coast. So we had some trouble with them, this, that, and the other. I had a guy runnin' the thing, and they got to fighting, him and Arthur, and we had some opposition, but I think they ran out of money; I don't think he had any money.

Parkinson: The Army put him off limits, he was running into all kinds

of trouble for one thing or another.

Concello: Oh, everything. He didn't have any money and, of course, they had the grift, you know. They had the grift and so we had some trouble, but I think they went broke. That year up around Spokane or someplace, they went broke.

Parkinson: Did you ever hear of an idea that Frank Ellis was on a Kelly-Miller show about a year or so ago as a fixer, and he was on the Arthur show, I guess. Do you recall any incident with him, in that opposition, any fighting particularly?

Concello: Oh, there might have been, but I wasn't mixed up in it. I had Red Larkin and all them rough guys around. Hell, I suppose they fought and raised hell and moved arrows and did everything else when they got up there. I think our opposition came with them when we got up around Oregon and Washington. And I think they did everything to each other, but I backed off; and I

had [Frank] McClosky, [Walter] Kernan, and Bob Reynolds and George Werner, I had good bosses. I had it organized with good bosses, so I'd sit down in that car and they'd say, "Them dirty bastards," and I'd say, "Well, get your best hold." Yeah, they had some problems with them up there; however, I think they was able to break them up.

Parkinson: Then in 1945 we're talking about Pan Pacific again. . . and again you had Arthur Bros. and Abie [Tavlin?] joined you about that time. He was the partner for a while.

Concello: Yeah, I sold him a piece of the show and there's your fightin' right there. Abie was fighting with them all the time. They was writing poison pen letter and all that stuff, and I said, "I don't want to hear about it, don't tell me about it. I'm making a lot of money here, and if they want to fight, the hell with them." So Abie was a fighter and he run the side show and the program, so he was fighting with them, which I wouldn't get into. But, eventually, along about that time . . . I think they went broke up in there someplace.

Parkinson: Yeah. I think they did that second year. Now, was 1945 as



good as 1943 and 1944?

Concello: It was three times as good.

Parkinson: Now, that's getting pretty big.

Concello: It was very good. In 1945, I think we run up. . . . and I was laying for Canada, so we opened the show and run up the coast and Tupper took it out to Vancouver Island. They went out there for a week and it was tremendous. Then we run right across Canada. . . .

Parkinson: Wasn't that 1946?

Concello: Maybe it was.

Parkinson: Your big year in Canada was 1946, according to my recollection, and Beatty was back with you at that point.

Concello: Yeah, I guess it might have been at that.

Parkinson: Now when Beatty came back, he'd been off with his own truck show.

Concello: When we closed in 1944 and Beatty told me he didn't like that there agent. I said, "Hell, what have you got to do with the agent? You ain't got nothing to do with the back end." So, anyway, he said he didn't like that agent and I told him, "If you don't like him, go someplace else." So he says, "I wanna do a show." I says, "All right, Clyde, go ahead. That's your privilege. If you're gonna do a show, go on." So I think he come back east and got mixed up in some damn thing and lost his ass.

Parkinson: Wallace Bros.

Concello: Some kind of a thing he got mixed up with, and this, that and the other.

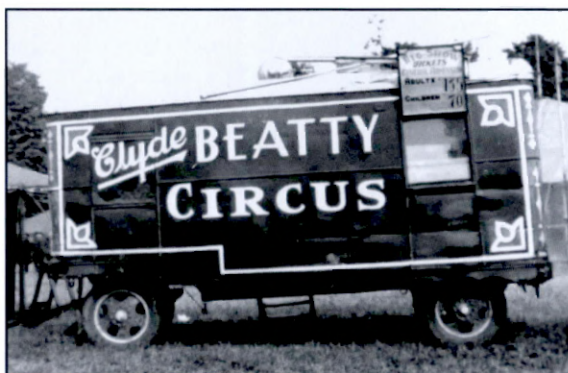
Parkinson: In the meantime, you've got the Pan-Pacific show and you're doing well, and in 1946, he comes back to you.

Concello: Well, at the end of 1944 he said he wanted to do a show, and I told him to go ahead. At the end of 1944, I paid Clyde on closing day, \$130,000. This was more f---- money than Clyde had ever seen in his f---- life. I said, "Go ahead, Clyde, do it; it's a free country." All right, he went out and he got something and did something, whatever.

Parkinson: That \$130,000, was that his share of the 1944 season?

Concello: Yeah.

Parkinson: Now he uses that to buy Wallace Bros.?



The former Russell ticket wagon on the 1946 Beatty show. Pfening Archives.

Concello: He uses that and says he's going to do a show; I told him to go ahead. So he went out, and I got a big long wire from Clyde, crying, in 1945. He said, "Dammit, I want to do something with you." I said, "All right, Clyde, tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a piece of the show, I'll give you a percentage of the profits, you don't own nothing; I'll give you a percentage of the profits after all costs and winter quarters." So, he comes out to the coast to see me and said, "Fine." So, Clyde's a good act, a good draw, so I said, "All right, you ain't got no problems. Come on, Clyde, I'll take you back. Now, look, the f--- agent's up there ahead of the show all the time, whether you like him or not." Clyde is mixed up with Bill Moore, he wanted him to be. . . . "Bill Moore, you S.O.B., you take Bill Moore's name, not me. That bastard gets drunk and I might not find him. This guy, Tupper, is a good reliable agent. S---, no, I ain't gonna do that." Anyway, he come back in 1946 and I think we run up the coast and run across Canada and run on down to someplace in Texas. When Clyde come back he says, "Now, look, I've got some Shrine dates down in Texas and I've already signed this contract, now; you've got to realize this before. I want to come back, I'm broke and I blowed that dough, but I've gotta tell you I signed that damn contract in Houston sometime in November." I said, "That's all right, Clyde, we can close up the first week in November; that's all right."

Parkinson: That would be for the 1946 season now.

Concello: The 1946 season.

Parkinson: All right. In that run

across Canada. Now you were the first show to get in there after the war. First, let me ask you this. Canadians never let truck shows in, and when you had a rail show, you had to put all the trucks on a train, you had to get some flats to move them on.

Concello: We had a train in 1946.

Parkinson: Yeah, you had the train, but you had some overland concessions or something.

Concello: We put them on the trucks.

Parkinson: Why was that? What was the Canadian deal on that?

Concello: That wasn't the reason. The reason was there wasn't no God damn roads across most of Canada; so I just hired me a couple of flats and put my two trucks, or whatever, on there. So I run across there with. . . the God damn roads were gravel and s---, you wouldn't make the long jumps. So I put it on the train and run it across Canada.

Parkinson: Now you've been telling me how good the Russell Bros. business was, and undoubtedly that's accurate, but I think that that 1946 has the reputation of being the most sensational season for making money that ever came down the pike. Did it look that way to you?

Concello: It was good. It was good.

Parkinson: You were doing three shows and you were doing turn-aways in the rain, and you were doing all the earmarks of a great season.

Concello: We did \$10,000 a day with a f--- show that cost \$2,000.

Parkinson: And that was particularly true in Canada.

Concello: Right across. And the coast was the same. The coast was good.

Parkinson: Then you came into the States at Niagara Falls and you come back to Texas to take care of Clyde's Houston date. Now in that period, you sold it, didn't you? After seeing that Canadian money, I suppose that Clyde thought he was going to be a manager again?

Concello: Yeah, Clyde was saying at the end of 1946, "I want to do a show." I says, "You ain't got any problem. You ain't got no problem. I'll tell you what I'll do." Clyde is a great guy, as long as Clyde stays in the



back end and behaves himself he's all right, but now, he says, "I don't like that George Werner." I says, "What the hell, you don't sleep with him, you ain't got nothin' to do with him, and the S.O.B. gets the tent up every day and down every day." "Well, I don't like him." Of course he had Bill Moore around as his manager. I don't know what for, but he had him around.

Parkinson: Let's look at that one a minute, because Moore comes into this year after year, now. What did Moore have on Beatty?

Concello: S---, I don't know. All I know is he had him around there. He wanted me to fire Tupper and put Bill Moore in as an agent. "Bill Moore ain't gonna do nothin' for me," I said, "I like Bill to talk to, but he ain't gonna do nothin' for me. Now if you want him to do something for you, that's different." Well, anyway, he had Bill around there, I don't know what he had on him or what the score was, but anyway, when Bill was around the show, I says, "All right, Bill, since Clyde's got you here you might as well do a little fixing," which probably cost me money in the long run. Anyway, he did some fixing around the show and kept the deputies off your neck for tickets, and what have you. Anyway, he had him around there, that's all I know. Then at the end of 1946, the show closed, and at this time I go to New York.

Parkinson: You sold the show.

Concello: No, no. The show closed in November 1946, so I go to New York and I get a call from John North, and John says, "Come on in here to New York, I want to talk to you."

At this point he said, "We're going to get the show back." I said, "That's good." He said, "But you've got to loan me some money." So I said, "What do you need?"

Parkinson: See Mrs. Charlie, according to the stories at that time, and they make a deal where he's going to be the man again, and this is when you're talking to the lawyers.

Concello: I'm talking to the lawyers in New York and fooling around and getting this deal set up, with Bob [Thrun?] and them, and Johnny's with the show and he's talking to me every night,

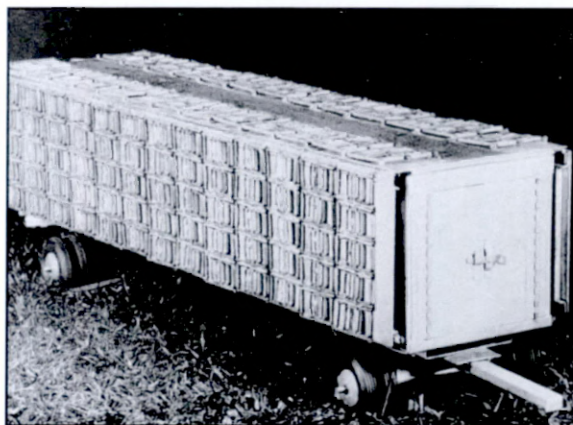
saying, "Hey, what about this?" So I finally get it kicked around and we're fooling around with the show until September or October; September, I think it was when we got it all set. Johnny says, "Well, you gotta go talk to the old lady. So finally he comes down here with the lawyers, and I'm down here, he makes a deal for 51%. That thing was three ways, Haley, Mrs. Charlie and Johnny. He says to Mrs. Charlie, "No, screw you. I ain't never gonna get in the position I was in before, wailed by Haley stock, 49-51." Finally he convinces her, he says, "All right." So he gets 51%. At this point he's got 51%, they can't throw him out.

Parkinson: Just prior to that, he had been through that thing with the ladies' agreement and all that thing, where he never really could control it.

Concello: He couldn't control it before because it was three ways and if any two of them got together, you're screwed. So when he made this deal at that point, I think it's the end of September, I go to Atlanta. "The jig is up, gentlemen." Jim Haley was running the show. The jig is up for Bob [Chisco?] there. Leonard Bisco walks in and says, "Haley, it's all over. Johnny's made a deal with Mrs. Charlie." Now, you see, when he made the deal with Mrs. Charlie, he wouldn't make this deal with Mrs. Charlie unless they agreed to buy the

Aubrey Ringling stock, and John said, "I will only do this on the basis of 51-49, that's the only basis I'll do it." So at that point they bought Haley's stock and John got 51 and Charlie got 49, so that was . . . of

The model of the seat wagon proposed by Concello. Pfening Archives.



course, they hadn't bought the stock but he had an agreement that if and when purchased, he would get 51 and she would get 49.

Parkinson: In that period now, first of all Jim Haley was back on the show and because of the Hartford thing, in part, he wants to be head of the show for a while.

Concello: He wants to be president of the show and at that point John is out, see?

Parkinson: Well, the two of them got along for a while.

Concello: The two of them got along, except Jim was going to be president, which John didn't want to stand for, see; and then he went and made a deal with Mrs. Charlie and she says, "Yes, if we buy this stock, you get 49-51; and if we don't buy this stock, you're the president of this show and I'm going to vote with you." So that was it.

Parkinson: And the deal there was, too, that Robert would be chairman of the board and not active? Then he had a stroke right away.

Concello: Yeah. He had a stroke at that time.

Parkinson: When you came on in Atlanta, of course that's kind of a landmark in all recent show history, when you walked on there that night, and yet didn't Jim know this was happening?

Concello: I supposed he must have had a God damned inkling, because Johnny was down here in Sarasota talking to Mrs. Charles, and so he must have known it was happening; however when we walked on in Atlanta that afternoon, we said, "Look, the jig is up. Here's the papers, Mrs. Charlie voted with John, you're out." Ed Kelly was there at the time with Haley.

Parkinson: He was general manager?

Concello: No, George Smith.

Parkinson: What did Kelly do then?

Concello: Kelly was assistant manager. Anyway, it come down to . . . Jim's railroad car is there, it belongs to the show, but this has happened. I said, "Sure, if he wants to take the railroad car to Sarasota, go ahead. I'm gonna get off the train and let



him take it to Sarasota, what the hell's the difference?" So that night, his car was gone and he was gone, and we took over the show at that point. The show closed the 20th of November, or something, down here.

Parkinson: When you went on the show that night, was Johnny with you, and Ron or Bisco, or someone like that?

Concello: No, Leonard Bisco was there and I had a half a dozen guys, I went on there and said, "Well, that's it." So we just left the show as is. George was there and said, "What's gonna happen?" I said, "S---, George, nothin's gonna happen, go ahead, just let it go on like it's going until the end of the season, what the hell? We ain't gonna do anything except I'm going to check the tickets and count the money." So we took over the show at that point, we operated until we closed up around November 20th or something.

Parkinson: You put the fear of God in a lot of people that night, and the next day in Chattanooga you told some guys how they were going to have to operate, and you got things squared away. Was the show in pretty bad shape at that point?

Concello: Not too bad. They was doing a lot of things that I wouldn't go for, but we changed all that the next season.

Parkinson: Okay, that's 1947. Oh, for your trip to Atlanta, did you come from New York or Bloomington?

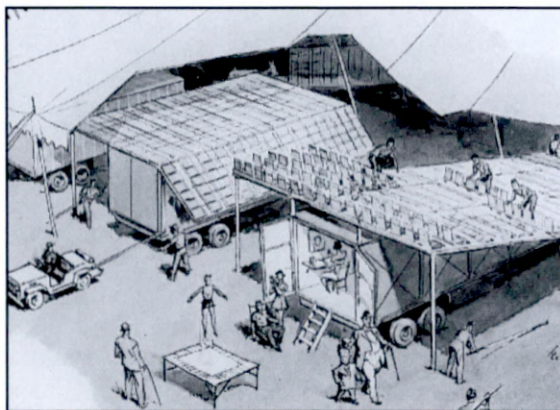
Concello: I think I came from Bloomington. I think I had been in New York and I believe I came from Bloomington.

Parkinson: Okay. Now in that money thing--you're the prime factor in it, you've got Frank Miller, you've got some other people in it?

Concello: No. I think I loaned him \$200,000 and I think Frank put up \$175,000 or \$200,000. I think we put up \$200,000 apiece, which we got paid back for when he got the money. No doubt about it, he paid the money back.

Parkinson: In that period, there's a couple of fellows in Bloomington, Sam Stern and Ed Raycraft. They're friends of yours, they're friends of mine. Did they ever have an interest in the show?

Concello: Ed had some paper on the Russell show. When I bought the



Drawing showing the seat wagons in use. Pfening Archives.

Russell show, I wanted equipment to belong to a holding company. Never put a nickel up, he never put a nickel; I wanted all the equipment when I bought the show. "Screw this," I said, "I'm going to have someone else own the equipment and I'm going to run the outfitting company." If I get sued in Odessa, Texas, God damn it, I'm going to have Raycraft come in and say, "Wait a minute, that's mine. Don't touch that, that's mine." So, Ed was in that thing for the reason of a holding company, but he never put up any money. I said, "Look, Ed, you bought this stuff for \$50,000." At one time he had the paper on the Russell show, no doubt about it.

Parkinson: How about Sam, did he ever figure in anything like this?

Concello: Nope, no money, no money.

Parkinson: How about people around the show, how about Merle Evans or anybody like that; did they ever get into something like this? [Apparently Art shook his head, signifying no.] All right. Now the winter of 1947-1948; well, you've been running the Russell show, you've had a lot of experience now as the guy that owns it, the guy with the responsibilities, and you've got some ideas beyond the tractors. Now you've got some seat ideas.

Concello: Well I did them in 1947 when I wasn't doing anything. When I sold the Beatty show at the end of 1946, I went to Bloomington--I was between Bloomington and New York, anyway, I developed a wagon which eventually was the Ringling seat wagons. I developed it and made a model and tried to sell it to Ringling in 1947. In May of 1947 I had a

model and says, "Hey, here's what you're going to have to come to, gentlemen, this labor situation is getting bad, this will save you a lot of money." Anyway, Haley says they ain't gonna' buy them. Anyway, I eventually developed a wagon and I went down to Lewis Diesel Engine Company and had these wagons and asked if they could make them and how much was it going to cost. Well, along about this

time money wasn't flowing too freely around the Ringling show, so in 1947 we took 'em and in 1948 the Ringling show bought the wagons. I sold them the wagons. I told them, "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll get the wagons and get them built for you, and what have you, and I want \$200,000." So I sold them the wagons for 200 grand.

Parkinson: Now in that connection, if I recall correctly, you started building those wagons before the 1948 season. So in 1948 you had the first wagons and you put them on--I think the blues were first with them, and the next year you finished it off and put the rest of them in.

Concello: I think we put half of them in first and a year or so later we put the rest of them in.

Parkinson: And the \$200,000 was for the whole ball of wax, for both years? Well, let me ask it this way--they paid you that over a period of time, I guess. Because as I heard it up to now, you leased the wagons to them. The supposition around the business was that you owned the wagons and rented them to the Ringling show.

Concello: Well, you might call it that, except I didn't. I made a flat deal with them, I said, "Now I get \$200,000, if you can't pay it, give me your notes." I got \$200,000 worth of notes to me. Now at this point, Louis Hagan says, "I got to have some money." At this point they didn't have any money. So I said, "You ain't got any problem. I'll get the money to pay for these wagons, give me your paper." So I called around and got \$20,000 off this guy and \$10,000 off this guy, and \$20,000 off of this guy, whatever Lewis Diesel had to have, \$80,000 or \$100,000, I got the money together and paid it. So, at that



point, I took notes from Ringling for this money and when Ringling paid I was in charge of operating Ringling, so the minute the money came in, I paid these guys off that loaned the money to build these wagons.

Parkinson: Did Stern have anything to do with that, Ed Raycraft and some guys around there?

Concello: I might have got some money off of Ed on that.

Parkinson: And some guys around the show, maybe?

Concello: Oh, hell, yes. Kernan give me some money, and Bob Reynolds give me some money, and Merle Evans probably give me some money. I promoted the money, I didn't put a G. D nickel in it myself. I wouldn't be surprised I didn't promote Frank Miller for \$20,000.

Parkinson: Hit him again, go back to the well again. Okay. Now in 1948, you've got the seats and you start to make some changes in the layout of the show. You did away with the kid show band, you put a calliope there; you're making it a much more efficient operation.

Concello: Well, the first thing is, you had a big f----- menagerie crew and you had a great big long menagerie and I said, "Oh, s---, God damn it, I'm going to do away with that and I'm going to put another middle piece in the big top and put all the animals, so as they walk in they can walk in through the animals and you ain't got all. . . you got the sidewall and the big top anyway. So we put the menagerie in front of the big top.

Parkinson: It took you a few years to get that done. You were doing--first of all, you came up with the aluminum poles.

Concello: Well, the first thing, the wood poles were hard to get and it's heavy, so let's get some aluminum poles. Another thing, you got great big main poles that took six niggers to pick one of them up when they're wet. So I said, "That don't make any sense, so let's put an inch cable up the pole and have one wire up there and one down, and if it rains, one guy can pick it up and it ain't gonna pick up water." So we figured out a winch



The five-pole big top with the menagerie in right end, Pfening Archives.

on the bottom of the pole and the damn winch took them up instead of this big rope. And, another thing, the rope cost you thousands of dollars a year; you had to replace it every year. So I says, "This cable, you put it on there once and it will last for twenty years." So we put all aluminum poles, which everybody said they wouldn't work, but they did; and then we put the seats and the aluminum poles, and the winches on the poles.

Parkinson: In that efficiency, you're cutting the show from Jim Haley's 108-109 cars, by 1951 it's seventy, but it's really basically the same show. (Yeah.) You're laughing about the cut, what brings that on?

Concello: Eddie had problems with labor and I says, "The only way I see this thing is you gotta have 300 niggers to put this thing up and down, if you can do it with ninety, you're better off. And another thing is, when you put the seat wagons in, nobody had to pick anything up; the damn thing, you get a seat crew and its got six or eight men and you say, 'Okay, put 'em up and take 'em down', I don't want to hear about them." You put them up and take them down, and there's no labor. So you cut your labor 50%. Your labor around the show was 50% of what it was.

Parkinson: In that early time of your taking over now from the 1948-1949 period, you put the show indoors in St. Louis, San Antonio, and the Cow Palace.

Concello: I said to North, "One of these days, in 1948-1949, along that period, look I want to put this thing in New York, in the Cow Palace, in St. Louis. I want to try four or five spots, and see what this thing does inside and see how it works out, and all about it." So, I think we did that

for two or three years; we put it inside. And I said, "North, one of these days you're going to see this show and there ain't gonna be any tent. The country's gonna build these g--d--- arenas around the country and when that hap-

pens, you're going to take your actors--no cook house, no light department and all this s---. You're going to go right in that thing, that's gonna happen to you in your lifetime." So, it did.

Parkinson: I guess St. Louis was never too good for the show and wasn't too good in the building that time, business wise, but from a logistical standpoint it showed that this would work.

Concello: It showed us that it would work, number one. Now it ain't a good policy to have a tent show and then put it in a building, for the simple reason you have all the big top crew and the side show crew and all the different crews, and you have them around the building and they ain't got nothing to do. So when they ain't got nothing to do, God damn it, they get drunk. So it's not a good policy to go in and out, but we was fishing to see how it would work if we didn't have all those guys.

Parkinson: 1949 was about when you were doing that, now in 1950 one of the main things was Cecil B. DeMille. You must have some recollections of that; maybe you made the deal.

Concello: First of all, we had a deal with the guy that made *Gone With The Wind*. Anyway, we had a deal with him and he was gonna do *The Greatest Show on Earth*, and John says, "All right, I'll give you six months." So we give him six months to do it. "You've got to come up with a script in six months." He was chasing a little gal at that time, he later married, and come to the Garden. I said, "You got the script?" He says, "No, I ain't got the g--d--- thing. I got to go to Europe and I want six months more." I says, "No, we ain't gonna give it to you." He says, "Well, I want to talk to John and God damn it, he's gonna have to give me this six



months, 'cause I want to do it, and I'm gonna do it, and this, that and the other." I said, "You're wasting me." Anyway, he couldn't get North's kind of hard to get it to. Anyway, he couldn't get to North. I told him, "There's no use kidding yourself, he ain't gonna give you six months. He give you six months and you said you'd come up with a script and you didn't do it." At this point, I said, "Let's get a hold of DeMille." DeMille jumped at it. He said, "Yes sir, yes sir, I'll do it, I'll do it." So we made a deal with DeMille and, of course, he got right on it and within six months he had a script. He had a script and said, "Now this ain't what it's going to be, but this is what I've planned. Here's a script, you wanted a script, and there it is. Now I'm going to change this 1,400 times." And I said, "All right, all right." So we finally made a deal with DeMille and that's how the picture was made.

Parkinson: Okay. In that, he wrote you into the script right away, gave you a Jeep, and wrote you in there as a lead. Also, they put a unit on the show, it was at Washington and they're filming the show, and they filmed some here in Sarasota, and so on. Do you have any standout recollections of that sort of thing? Was there anything special, any problems?

Concello: First of all, DeMille and Miss Rosson and a couple of other people come on the show the year before in North Dakota, in Minot and three or four other cities. All they did is look and make sketches, and look, and they had two or three guys with pencils that made beautiful sketches --they just sketched everything. They was around there for a couple of weeks, DeMille and his secretary, Miss Rosson, come on there and stayed with the show for a week. And was up in the morning and seen it move on, he was around at night and seen it move off, and then he'd be around at different times. John was gone to Europe, s---, he was never there, so we put him in John's car and said he could do what he wanted. So DeMille looked everything over, had his writer with him, and that's where he come up with what he wanted to do. Then he come down here and shot for a couple of months, and then he said, "We gotta do it." So we made it. - I said,



Art Concello and C. B. DeMille. Illinois State University collection.

"All right, in Philadelphia we're going to start this thing up and let you shoot." He got more lights, all the God damned lights in the world for the color. So he shot the different ones and put it together.

Parkinson: I saw it at Washington where they were shooting the last of that, I guess.

Concello: I think Philadelphia and Washington was where he shot it.

Parkinson: That gets up to 1951, where by now you're doing away with the menagerie, you've got it all in one top, and now it's seventy cars and so on.

Concello: Three sections instead of four.

Parkinson: It's getting tougher to railroad it, too, isn't it?

Concello: Yeah. It's getting tough to railroad, the help and the railroads, and this and that and the other, so you've got to keep it down to seventy instead of 109. And it makes it easier to move and you can move it.

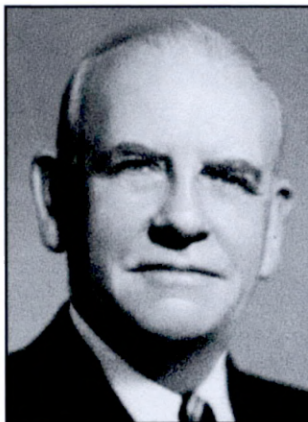
So it goes along in 1949, it's all right, it makes money, it makes money in 1950, 1951 and 1952. In 1952, I says to North, "Tell you what I gotta do. I want to do this thing on sixty cars and I think we can creep along and get this thing up and get it down, and get it up and get it down and make a little money

with it." North says, "No, f--- you, I don't agree with you." At the end of 1952, I says, "John, I can't handle it unless you get it on a basis so it's easy." He says, "I don't want to build Fords, I want to build Cadillacs." So I said, "Good Day, so I walked in the office and wrote out, I'm resigning, you go ahead." I wrote him a note and says, "John, I wish you all the luck in the world, but if you make it bigger I'm afraid you ain't gonna be able to get it up and down and overland." So I says, "Come see me in two years." So they went out in 1953 and 1954 and it got to that point. I had it seventy; I think he went to eighty that next year and so, in July he come down here and said, "That note was a few months off, but it sure was right. I couldn't get it up and I couldn't get it down." I said, "Well, you're the boss. You own it. God damn, it's all right with me." So in 1953. . . no, let me see.

Parkinson: Let me start out with some timing there, if you don't mind. My notes show that in 1951 you had seventy; in 1952 you tried some sponsors, you tried the Firestone thing, you tried some other things along that line. You had Eagles in there doing some sponsorship things.

Concello: A guy named Tupper sold them, Waldo Tupper.

Parkinson: Yeah, I knew him. In 1953 that's when other sources indicate that you figured they ought to be on fewer cars, and that's when that kind of change came about. You had Mr. Mistin in that period, and was there a connection also between that timing and the fact that North had paid back your \$200,000?



Waldo Tupper, Concello's favorite general Agent. Pfening Archives.

Concello: He had paid everything back to that point. I think he had paid me everything he had owed me, back at that point. No, I don't think that was it. I think that the whole thing in a nutshell was that I wanted to make it



sixty cars and he wanted to make it eighty. I said, "Jesus, where are you going to get these guys to move this s---? Where you gonna get them?" So, anyway, in 1953, I guess, I threw up my hands and said, "Well, I ain't gonna do it." I said, "You do it. You ain't got any problems. G-d--- it, you do it yourself and then you ain't got any problems." So they go out then and I'm not with them.

Parkinson: Now that's about 1954.

Concello: That's the end of 1953. Yeah. We were sitting there in January 1954, right at the beginning of 1954.

Parkinson: Now the show is short on money and they can't move it, and they're having a hell of a fix, there. At that time, is that when McClosky had it and is that when they got to Minneapolis, or is that another year?

Concello: No. In the beginning of 1954, I left. So he gets a guy on called Mike Burke. Mike Burke he gets on, and McClosky and Kernan and Lawson and all them guys are on the show. So they go along during that season, I think he calls them in Chicago and says, "You bastards, this, that and the other thing. You ain't getting it up, you ain't getting it down." So I think they go up to Minneapolis and he fires them all.

Parkinson: What were you doing in those years--taking it easy and looking at that Canadian money you had?

Concello: In 1954, it ain't bad; sitting right here and saying, "The hell with that thing."

Parkinson: You can't beat that. Now, at the end of 1954, Christmas time, you're sitting down here, Beatty comes on the scene again. So tell me about that--when you put some seats over there and you ran into Bill Moore again.

Concello: Beatty come to me and says, "Jesus Christ, Art, I am in trouble." I said, "What's your trouble?" He says, "Them bastards clipped me in Vegas." So I says, "What is your trouble? Oh, well, all right, Clyde." He's sitting here saying, "You gotta help me, you gotta help me." So I said, "What do you need?" He says, "To get this show out, I need 100 grand." So I says, "All right, Clyde. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take chattel mortgage on the show, everything you got; and I'll put a guy over there

to collect my money every day." So I sent Genders out there."

Concello (con't) "And I'm gonna have my man there and I'm furnish you a couple of acts." So that season, I think I collected \$40,000 plus interest, so he owed me \$60,000 the next year.

Parkinson: Let me interrupt for just a minute. When was it you ran into an argument with Moore, in that period?

Concello: No. I just had arguments with Moore all the time. During this period, it will come up at a later time. Now I've got Genders out there, he's on the door, and I said, "I want my money every day, Clyde." So he [Genders] collects \$40,000 in that first season. The show goes back to winter quarters, goes out the next spring and they ain't doing no good. So I get a phone call from Genders and I fly to California. He says, "We ain't gettin' this and that, and we ain't gettin' the other." In the meantime, McClosky and Kernan have bought the concessions; so they've advanced him some money. They don't know what to think when I show up; I show up out there around the Los Angeles area and the damn thing is going to close. I said, "Take hat s.o.b. back to Deming." So they get the money together and take it back to Deming. So I put a hand on him back there and said, "Now don't do anything. You pay me the \$60,000 or I'll take all this equipment." At this point, Kernan and McClosky are trying to make a deal with me; they've got a second mortgage for

Clyde Beatty, Concello's sometimes employee. Pfening Archives.



their \$30,000 or \$40,000, whatever they advanced him. I've got a chattel first mortgage. So they're trying to make a deal with me. I says, "You ain't got any problem, fellows, I'll make a deal with you. We'll take the show out next year, now, if you want to. We'll take the show out, but I want my \$60,000 first. The first money that comes in, I want my \$60,000 plus interest. At that point, I'll go along with you. Whatever your second mortgage is you can take that money second, then we can cut it up after that; except I want 51% of the show, you guys can have 49%." Well, it rassled around, rassled around, and rassled around, finally they got a hold of Jerry Collins and he loaned them some money and they took the show and paid me my \$66,000. Then they went on their way.

Parkinson: Okay, and they did that mid-season, where, in 1956? [Yeah] And so by the time it reopened, they paid you your money and...

Concello: I got my \$66,000. Yeah.

Parkinson: Okay. Now, the Ringling show grinds to a halt at Pittsburgh, and Mike Burke and the whole thing comes tumbling down. In that thing, then, it goes back to--it's like after the fire and after the strike, it limps back to Sarasota.

Concello: It runs back to Sarasota. I'm sitting in the Plaza Restaurant with my friend Montgomery and John North. Montgomery Roberts is the owner of stores here and in Bradenton and around. We're sitting in the Plaza and John North (take that back) he's sitting in the Plaza having dinner and Montgomery's there. He says, "Where is Artie?" Bud says, "I don't know where that S.O.B. is, John." John says, "Don't tell me that, he's here someplace." Bud says, "Yeah, he's in town, but I don't know where he's at." So, finally, Bud got ahold of me and I went down to see John. So I said, "John, I'm sure sorry to hear that the God damn thing closed up." He said, "Well, it worked out like you said it was going to. Damn it, I went around a couple of times--you can't get it up, you can't get it down, you can't move it, blah, blah, blah." I said, "Well, I don't want to be one of them guys that said 'I told you so,' I'm sorry that the thing's closed up, it makes jobs for a lot of people, and what have



you." John says, "I want to make a deal with you." I says, "S---, John, you want to make a deal with me, but I don't want to work. The hell with you, I don't want to make no deal. What's your problem?" He says, "I want to make a deal with you to take the show out in the buildings." I said, "How much do you owe?" He said, "We owe a million six hundred thousand in bills." I says, "John, you S.O.B., you come around here when the God damn thing is sick. Damn it, I don't want nothing to do with it."

So this goes on for thirty days. I can't get out of my God damn car or anything else unless John North is there. I'm on my railroad car, sitting there, and he says, "Artie, now come on." So he's talking, talking, talking. I says, "John, you s.o.b., you owe a million six hundred thousand dollars in money, and you come to me and say you are going to do shows in buildings next year. It's going to take some money." So finally, after thirty days, I says, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll put the show in the buildings and you go away from it and let it alone. You go to Europe and let it alone. If you're going to do it. . ."

He says, "Now's the time to do it." I says, "You go ahead and do the thing and I'll sit here and relax and do as I please. If you're going to it, you do it. If I'm going to do it, then you got to let me do it. You can't be running saying this, that and the other; second guessing me. Go ahead, you've got an opportunity now." John says, "Well, God damn it, I'm sick."

I says, "Why don't you sell the S.O.B.? If you're sick, sell it, get some money out of it, and the hell with it." "Well, I'll do that," he says.

So at that point I call up my friend Bill Veeck. I said, "Bill, come on down here." (He says) "Yes sir, I want to buy that thing. I can really hoot and holler about that." So he come down here and spent some time, we went back to the World Series and bulls--in New York with him, but, anyway, it seems he couldn't come up with the money at the time he wanted it. So I said, "All right, John, I'll tell you what you do. If you want to work for a few days/weeks, come on down here, I'll put it in the buildings, you go away and let it alone until I get the thing after I got it organized two or three years, then fine, you can hoot

and holler; but you got to let it alone. If I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it. If you're going to do it, go ahead and do it." So he said, "Fine, you do as you please. You get the show." I said, "Get me a statement. The first thing you got to do is you got to sit down here on this telephone here and you're going to call up every S.O.B. you owe a nickel to. Go on over there and get some money." He says, "What do you need?" I said, "Go on over there and get \$350,000. I think I can get it open and set and we can pacify these bill guys, and what have you."

So he went out and got on the phone and called up this guy and says, "Look, we owe you six thousand dollars, I'm sending you six hundred; I'm gonna pay you." But 99% of them says, "Okay, we'll go along." So at that point. . .

Parkinson: From them you're getting time, they're not loaning you more money?

The 1947 Ringling-Barnum program published by Harry Dube. Pfening Archives.

Concello: No, I ain't getting none. Just saying you owe a million six, so you're saying, "Hey, the show's going out and we're going to pay you over the next couple of years; we're gonna pay you." Well, I said "Go over to Oklahoma and get some money." So he went over and got \$350,000. He's got some oil wells over there. At that point, I says, "All right, we'll get the building show." So we start getting the building show together and start fooling around and getting the Garden, and I got the arena managers, and I got Charlotte and a bunch of them and said, "Now look, the first year or two your God damn routing ain't gonna be any good, because you're gonna run into a building and say, 'Hey, I want your building,' and a guy's gonna say, 'I got a flower show in here, you can't have it.'" So, anyway, we played inside and outside and around and about the first year.

Parkinson: As I recall it, you mentioned the Arena Managers Association, you worked with it--John some-

body that was their secretary, and you got the Hersheys and New Haven and all those. . . .

Concello: Boston. Anyway, the guy in Boston, what's his name--Walter Brown--I sat down with Walter Brown and he said, "Look, I can get you eleven weeks (or whatever the hell it was)." And I said, "All right, we'll take it." That was the start of it.

Parkinson: Now some of those weren't too great.

Concello: It wasn't too good the first year.

Parkinson: But Charlotte was about your first good one, wasn't it?

Concello: Charlotte was good. Oh, 60% of them was all right; some of them was dogs. Anyway, we was

grinding along and playing that air/ground and any God damn thing that first year. Harry Dube worked on it, and I got Walter Brown to give him the eleven weeks to start him, and I said, "Dube, do the best you can. Get a ball park, a fair ground, anything you can." At that point we got Irvin Feld and Harry

Lashinsky and a guy named Martell Brett to promote. John says, "Why don't you. . . ." I says, "John, you S.O.B., you've got a big old tent out there and I'm going to have to spend about fifteen hours a day getting this thing all kicked around and new rigging and new lights and new organization, and trucks and whatever. Christ, I ain't gonna have time to do nothing. I'll get Harry Dube." I called Harry and brought him down here and said, "Here's our problem, Harry. Get this God damn thing and get what you can the first year. The second year will be better and the third year will be all right."

Parkinson: You decided you were going to use these local promoters like Feld and Harry and Brett.

Concello: Outside the arena manager, the building promoter. The Garden's all right, you do a couple of million bucks there, so you got some money to operate with. So the Garden and Boston. . . I think we had twelve weeks of the building promot-





er, the rest of them . . . God damn it, if you ain't got nobody to promote 'em, you ain't got any money. So you ain't got no dough, so how the hell you send out a bunch of promoters out if you ain't got no money. I says, "John, you ain't got no money. You can probably get some promoters but that's going to take you a couple of years to get guys that's any good. We'll use Feld and Lashinsky and Martell Brett." And I had another guy called Warner or something, out on the coast.

Parkinson: Yeah. Warner Buck.

Concello: Warner Buck. "We'll use Buck in five or six spots out on the coast."

Parkinson: Did Feld have any different deal, I mean not in money, but was there more emphasis on Feld than on the others at that point?

Concello: No, first thing I did was always give Feld ten or fifteen towns, and Harry ten or fifteen towns, and Brett ten towns; and Feld wanted them all. I said, "Oh, s---, you ain't never gonna get me in a position where you got them all." So I never would let Feld have over fifteen towns, then I'd say, "Harry, you get them fifteen, and you've this fifteen, and Brett, you've got these ten or twelve." And the buildings has got a few.

Buildings promoted you in New York and a few spots; and down in Greenville, we had a guy in there, some local thing, that promoted it, so you'd never get that. Fen, I think.

Parkinson: Yeah. Herman Fen. Well, he's still storming around.

Concello: So that was the thing about the first year. So anyway, the first year we go out and we get along. We don't need any more money. The second year you go out and you make some

money. The end of the third year you'd paid off the million six.

Parkinson: All right. Now, in that time, you're improvising in the moves about like you are about some of these other things because of no money. . . .

Concello: No money. I've got some semis, I think we got. . . . I took the trucks from the show, the show had some big Macks; I said, "All right, send them over the highway." So I took the Macks and pulled the stuff, and I think we bought a half-dozen



Ringling executives in Sarasota winter quarters just prior to the transfer to Venice. Left to right, Lloyd Morgan, manager; Tuffy Genders, general manager; Art Concello, executive director; Rudy Bundy, treasurer and Bob Dover, performance director. Pfening Archives.

semis and had a couple of flat trucks --big canvas trucks, We put the rubber and crap on and got it all together. And I said, "All right, the elephants and horses, we'll put them on a baggage car and buy the tickets for the people." So the first year, you did the best you could. So the second year I said, "S---! We gotta have a train." So I looked out there in the field and you got 25 God damn coaches. S---! there's my thing. I built some little wagons, and then I've been around the buildings for years with Orrin, so I said, "G--d---, I've gotta have a wagon that's 7'11" high. Some of those G--d--- buildings have eight foot doors." So I said, "All right, we'll cut that railroad car." Some of the guys came down and said, "You can't do that." So, anyway, I said, "F-- 'em." So I went down and got Gene Parchesky and I made a sample tunnel car, cut it out and rebraced it and did everything, so I said, "All right, fine." The [AAR?] guy said, "What's the matter with it?" I said, "There ain't a G--D-- thing the matter with it." So I said "That's it." So I got the train, tunneled out this train, and went down and built little aluminum wagons so that you don't have to tip. . . . you can run them right in on the floor and unload them and take them back out.

Parkinson: That "7'11", you were thinking then not only of building

doors but also the size of a car.

Concello: Yeah. I couldn't get any higher than a car, and you've got some buildings where you get inside . . . look at that Cleveland building--you get inside and you've got eight foot damn beam across where you can't get. . . . now the minute you don't have those wagons 7'11", them guys got to lug all that God damn rubber and stuff into the arena, then lug it back and put it. . . S---! Why not have the wagon sitting right there, move it down there and unload this and move it around the arena floor, then you took it out and put it in the train. So it worked out all right.

Parkinson: Then you came up with the fifteen cars and you're, first of all, moving in passenger service, but that didn't last, did it?

Concello: No, we moved in passenger service only in the first year when we had the trucks; after that we made a freight move. You can get a fifteen car freight move and then the trains waiting for you when you want to go. Everything was freight moves.

Parkinson: But you could move a lot faster.

Concello: S---! Another thing--passenger service, the way it was, you might have to wait until the next day to get out. So this freight service was just ideal. The train and crew would say, "What time do you want to leave?" We'd say, "I want to leave at three o'clock," and they'd be sitting there waiting. You get that thing loaded and they're gone. There ain't no difference in passenger and freight service, they went along at fifty miles an hour, sixty miles an hour.



Parkinson: In that process, you also invented this new rigging that would go into any building, a minimum number of ties.

Concello: Yeah. That first year I said, "I gotta have a rigging, God damn it, that will put the flying act up there in the middle of the two ends." So then you gotta have the side so it will go up or down, you can pull it in or out; another thing, you had have it so you could hang it from six points in the ceiling. You had enough trouble getting six points in the ceiling in some of these buildings with false ceilings in them.

Parkinson: It wasn't necessarily six, you were trying to get it as few as possible, is that right?

Concello: As few as possible, but if you got a frame over one ring, a frame over the middle, you gotta have six points for them crow feet to work. The crow feet won't work if you don't have a point on each side so you can pull it up. Yeah, I developed all that rigging they got.

Parkinson: Feld is taking more and more of those dates in this period, isn't he? Isn't he playing Martel Brett's jobs out?

Concello: I think he takes them all. I don't think he's got any outside promoters.

Parkinson: No, I don't mean now; I mean in the time you're talking about here, in the 60's.

Concello: Martel's dropped off. The new dates would come up and Feld would say . . . Of course I had a deal with Feld. I says, "Look, you're gonna take any date I said, good or bad." He said, "I'll take it good or bad. If it loses money, I ain't gonna cry." I said, "Don't come back to me crying, now. Good or bad, you take it." He said, "Okay." So when I got out and wanted to break a jump, I said, "Feld, you gotta deal with it." He said, "All right," And he took 'em. Where are you at, 1956?

Parkinson: Well, we're beyond that; we're into these years when you were creating the new rigging, creating a new train, going into buildings, and jelling that whole building system. And that got to be a pretty good thing. One thing you skipped over was the rubber flooring.



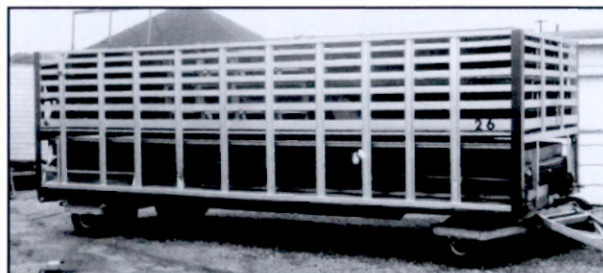
Unloading a tunnel car. Pfening Archives.

Was that your idea?

Concello: Yes sir, 100%. These buildings, when I got to thinking about it a year or so, I said, "Jesus Christ, I can't go into these God damn buildings. The first thing out I'd run into Philadelphia, and they'd say 'You S.O.B. you ain't gonna put that dirt on my good hardwood floor.'"

Philadelphia's hardwood. So I says, "Jesus Christ, there's gotta be." Then Ned Irish kept coming to me. "Dammit, Art, it costs \$5,600 to put this dirt in here." So, I said, "There's gotta be a better way." So I went to US Rubber and said, "Look, I want a floor about a quarter of an inch thick, I want it in 20x6 sheets, and I want it made out of tire rubber; I want it tough so horses can run on it, and this and that." The guy says, "Yes sir, I've got it for you." So, I said, "All right, make up a set." The damn thing, I think, cost twenty grand in them days, but I says, "We gotta go for it." If you're gonna go in these buildings you gotta have something to throw out on their floor, and when we get out of the building we just pick it up and go and say, "Good day, gentlemen." Any building with a wood floor in it, they don't want you to put dirt on it, they have a helluva

Wagon designed to carry the rubber floor mats. Pfening Archives.



time getting it up and then you have floor problems. "They stained my floor, or there's moisture in it." So, anyway, another thing, that God damn dirt, in a lot of these towns you go into and say, "I've gotta have dirt in there." And that S.O.B. says, "It's raining like a S.O.B." We got it in there, but it's mud. Anyway, the floor, I devel-

oped.

Parkinson: . . . Okay, on that floor, you've got two wagons with this frame that comes out, you put the rubber on it and pretty soon you winched the wagon back over the frame.

Concello: No, no. You've got rollers on the wagon and you take them rollers and put three or four men down each side and it goes right over a roller and then drops in a wagon. You don't have to move--you move the wagon every time you do it, but you can just take that thing and pull it--you've got a little winch in the front and you just pull it up on the wagon and go plop. Plus, I got some vice grip arrangements and you take six men and then can just snap one end and set it any where you want it. It worked out good.

Parkinson: What led to the tunnel car . . . the winching and all of that? Did you hark back to the times that there were two car shows, little shows, the Elmer Jones shows; did you ever see any of those things?

Concello: What led to it is you had twenty-five cars, you didn't have any money and you had twenty-five cars sitting out there looking at you. I said, "Jesus Christ, you've got twenty-five cars out there, all of them got big triple axles under them, trucks under them." I said, "Jesus Christ, now if I developed a little aluminum wagon, we can put them in; and another thing, I wanted to develop a little 7x11 wagon so I can get it in and out of these buildings, 'cause, damn, when you take a wagon right out on the floor and load that in there, it's a lot easier than carrying the damn things out in the yard like some of the ice shows did. So I said, "Hell, this is



the answer." So I made that sample and the [AAR?] guys come down here and said, "S---, that's fine." That's when the tunnel cars was made for all the crap.

Parkinson: You said when you started doing that there was talk about using the ice show promotion system, using the ice show stuff; but right away it was the ice shows that were copying you. And they came along and wanted a train and Morris Chelfen asked you to build a train for him; I guess you traded the services of a European agent of his for building the train. And you also had John . . .

Concello: . . . Harris. John Harris, we're playing Pittsburgh and John Harris comes down, of course the show in them days, when you come in there an hour and a half, an hour and forty-five minutes to two hours when the show is over-two hours from then there ain't a God damn thing in that building. John Harris says, "I don't believe this." And we went into Pittsburgh and in three or four hours, five hours at the most, you're set up. He says, "I don't believe THIS." So he went out to California, fooled around, and if he'd have come down to see me I'd have said, "Sure, John, I'll get the guys and build you a train if you want it." But, Jeez, he went to California and he did this and that; and he said, "I spent a ton of money." When I seen him later I said, "John, you should have come and seen me." He said, "Hell, I didn't know whether you'd talk to me or not." I says, "Sure, I'd have talked to you. I talk to everybody."

Parkinson: I talked to John about that before he died, and he gives you all the credit. I'll tell you one other thing that he probably told you, but he and Dick Palmer they used to--well, they still do--have those promoters' meetings in Atlantic City, and old John was there and he's tough and he's storming around, but he's saying that in that period they saw the circus, they got the idea, they tried to do it themselves and, for one thing, right away they had flat tires and, first of all, they looked at yours and said, "No sense in our putting two wheels on there because we don't have

that heavy a load," so then they had flat tires. Then they realized that they better come and see how you'd been thinking this out after all. What happened in connection with Chalfen--same sort of thing?

Concello: No. Chalfen come down and says, "Hey, get the guys." So I went down to Gene and says, "Make him a train and make him some wagons." So he made them. They had a little tire trouble at first because I put three wheels on the Ringling wagons on each corner and I think Grant or somebody said, "Oh, put two on there," but, that was a mistake. They had a little wheel trouble, but they got it all ironed out to their satisfaction. But now I guess they've discontinued it, they wanted to go back to trucks.

Parkinson: While they've discontinued it, the Ice Capades show uses it, and when it comes to our building now, it's got your system just as clear. They finally bought some system cars and then the railroad condemned some they had and they had to change overnight in Chicago yards and they got some Santa Fe baggage cars or something; but the wagons are yours, it's the same deal. Well, in that situation, one of the things that figures is--were you there when the show went to South America?

Concello: Sure, I made all the arrangements.

Parkinson: Okay, I was trying to make some of these notes from memory and I blew that one, I couldn't remember. And then, now with Chalfen and the train deal, you got a European route. What's the European story?

Concello: Well, the European--I never wanted to do the show in Europe, but John lived over there all

The Beatty show ticket wagons in 1956. Pfening Archives.



the time and he wanted it. For three or four years I kept stalling and stalling, "I don't want to do the G--D---European show," I said, "I don't know anything about Europe and I don't want to do it." Anyway, North finally said, "You gotta do this European show." So I said, "I'll get some physical stuff together, but I don't know nothing about Europe. G--D--- it, I don't want to do it!" I finally said, "All right, if you want me to do it, I'll got over there and get the wagons and the crap and the physical end ready." At that point, Chalfen had been promoting shows over there for years, so I said, "Morris, do you want to promote it?" He said, "Yeah, I want to promote it." So he made a deal with Morris to promote the show over there. I said from the start that it was a mistake. What the hell, they ain't got the buildings over there to do it right. So, anyway, they did the show in Europe and it wasn't no good. At that point I didn't want to do the World's Fair thing; I did everything I could to stop it, but they said, "Oh, well, we'll do it." So Harry Dube and Bob (Tron?), they wanted to do it, so finally John said, "All right, do it." So, we're in Europe--I got the show ready--physical end of the show ready, and I said, "I gotta leave." John says, "S---, you can't leave." I says, "S---, if I don't leave there ain't gonna be no tent up at that damn World's Fair, I'll tell you that right now. It ain't gonna be up." So, anyway, he said, "Well, the hell with you, you can't leave." I said, "I either got to go leave and do it, or it ain't gonna be up. They're gonna stick you for a lot of money." At this point we got into an argument. "It's all right with me," I says, "Screw you; you can do it all. I told you this when you come to me and said, 'Get this building show,' and I said, 'If you don't let me do it my way, then do it yourself.'" So, at this point, when I left Europe, I says, "Let North do it himself." So I come back here and come down here to Sarasota and minded my own business.

Parkinson: Well you got the fair opened?

Concello: No, no, no, I didn't. This was before the fair and so I come back and said, "John, do it yourself. Screw you." So I left and come on down here, at this



point, they woke up and said, - - -

Parkinson: ... follows another pattern that fell into shape for you on a whole lot of things, you were able to with the Beatty seats and with the Ringling stuff and with this thing, you followed a pretty good pattern there of framing these things, getting the physical things set up; you'd get in the clear on that and then somebody else inherited the headaches, or one of the headaches. And they got them with the fair, I guess, they didn't do any great shakes with that.

Concello: No.

Parkinson: Okay. Now since that time ... oh, in that period, the shows are playing buildings, but the Garden is kind of nervous about it. They're starting to think about putting out a show of their own, or framing a show. As a matter of fact, you joined the Garden at that point?

Concello: The Garden called me up after I had left the show and said, "Come up here and help. We want to frame a show and we want you to run it." I said, "All you gotta have is one thing--money. Sure, you can frame a show and if you frame a building show, what are you going to call it?" "Well, Madison Square Garden Circus." I said, "Well, that's it; you ain't got no problem. You can get a buck here and I guess you can show them up and play ten or fifteen buildings, and see how it is. All you gotta do is have the money. S---, you get the costumes and I'll build the crap for you and get the show together for you." At this point, Felt in the Garden is dealing with North trying to buy Ringling. So he's back and forth, and back and forth, and said, "Well, I don't know now, get me some figures together." I says, "That ain't no problem, gotta put some money up and this is what it will cost." He says, "Maybe I'll buy Ringling." I said, "That's fine. If you're going to buy Ringling, you don't need to. You got the package all ready." Anyway, he didn't get to buy Ringling. I guess they couldn't get. ... him and North, he made a half dozen trips to Europe to see North and couldn't get together.

So this was all going on because North kept calling me. He says, "Well I'm going to sell this thing." I says, "Good, sell it," because I had ten percent of the stock.



Irvin Feld, the new owner of Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows. Photo courtesy of Feld Entertainment, Inc.

Parkinson: In Ringling?

Concello: Yeah. I had ten percent of North all the way around.

Parkinson: Oh yes. You got the percentage of North at the time you came back to put it in buildings. Okay.

Concello: Now I only had ten percent of North's end. I only had ten percent of fifty-one, I didn't have ten percent. ... I didn't have nothing to do with the forty-niners.

Parkinson: Now the way that appeared in public print at the time doesn't make it too clear, but it implies that you had ten percent of North, not only in the circus ...

Concello: ... Everything. Oil, real estate, everything. I had ten percent of everything.

Parkinson: Okay. So now he's threatening to sell it and that being the case, he comes to you as a stockholder. ...

Concello: ... Now when Feld was over there dealing with him, he said, "Now Concello's got ten percent of you, ain't he?" North said, "Yes, he has." (Feld said) "Is that going to be any problem?" North said, "I don't think so." So North called me up and said, "Hey, I want to sell this thing." I said, "You ain't got any problem. Make me an offer what you'll give me for my ten percent." He says, "All right." So he made me an offer and I sold [to] him before he sold to Hofheinz and Feld, I sold him my ten percent.

Parkinson: At the price he suggested?

Concello: At the price I suggested. I said, "Here's what I want for it," and he said, "All right."

Parkinson: So now the Garden show doesn't develop. It's Feld rather than Felt, but you're still with the Garden at that point.

Concello: Well, I ain't with them really. They just called me in and says, "Hey, we want to do a show, we want you to put it on and we want you to run it." Now I don't know whether this was a trading, or what it was. All I know is that Felt made a half dozen trips over there trying to buy Ringling. And Felt called me in and said, "Now, if we buy Ringling, will you operate it for us in the buildings?" And I says, "Pay me enough money and I'll do it. You ain't got any problem. Pay me the money and I'll do it." So that was my only thing with the Garden. They was going to do a show and I said, "I'll do it if they pay me."

Parkinson: Either Ringling or another show.

Concello: I said, "I don't give a God damn, if it's Ringling or if you want to do another show, fine."

Parkinson: But it all culminated in Irvin Feld buying it instead.

Concello: When Irvin Feld bought it, I guess he went to the Garden and the Garden hyped the rent up and says, "Hey, you pay seventeen five for four walls, a day."

Parkinson: He gets it back in the deals he's got with some other buildings.

Concello: Oh, well, sure. Well, he gets it back right there, but I mean he probably went in and said, "Here, I'll give you X dollars a day." He paid their price.

Parkinson: At that point, then, the Garden's got no interest. ... all their excitement about a new show is over the dam. Now they've got a show on long term contracts.

Concello: As soon as Feld bought the show, the other guy seen he wasn't going to get it, he says, "Well, I don't know. We may do a show, we may not." So I guess at that point Feld went in to see him and says, "Look, if we can get enough rent, to hell with it, we won't do a show. If we don't get enough rent, then we'll do a show of our own."



Parkinson: Well that pretty well brings us down to a late time. There are a couple minor points along the way. One is, you're either handling the Ringlings or you're between those times, and about every time you're in between you look at the Beatty show.

Concello: Every ten years I got fired or quit. In 1942 I quit; in 1954, I quit, and in 1964, I was out every ten years.

Parkinson: And every ten years you looked at the Beatty show as a substitute. So this time around, Bonnie Kernan (widow of Walter) and . . . Concello. This last time? Frank come down here this last time and says, "Hey, I'm having problems with Jerry Collins, why don't you buy Bonnie's interest?" I says,

"To help you, fine, I'll do it." So I bought Bonnie's stock. I owned a third, he owned a third and Jerry owned a third. So I went around there for about a year and it was too tough for me. A lot of grief around that one day show, so I told Frank, "I'm going to sell my interest. Do you want to buy it, or do you and Jerry want to buy it? Any way you want to do." So, these things are all fine when you're thirty years old, or twenty five, or eighteen, or forty; but when you get my age, s---, you don't want no grief.

Parkinson: Were you thinking then about putting the Beatty show indoors?

Concello: No. I just . . . Frank come down here and said he was having trouble with Jerry and he said, "Buy this Bonnie's stock." And I said, "All right, if you want me to, I'll buy it, or you can give me the money and I'll do anything you want me to do; I'll help you." So I bought it and fooled around with it for about a year and told Frank that this was too tough. I says, "these one day stands are too tough for me, so you and Jerry buy this stock and then you can do what you want. You gotta do it, but I don't; I got enough money I don't have to do it and if you want to do it, go ahead. It's too tough for me. If some little thing comes along, I might do it with a show for a month or two, or something like that; but outside of that I don't want to do anything."

Parkinson: Well, this gets you to

the Russian kind of a deal. You'll take a show to Russia, you'll do. . . .

Concello: Chalfen come and says, "Hey, I want you to do this Russian thing for me." So I says, "All right. What are you gonna pay me? Pay me a good salary, pay my expenses and do this and that. I'll take that thing to Russia." And when the Russian show come here, I kicked it around the country for . . . something like the Russian show, you're in town a week and it's ten or fifteen weeks. You say, "Oh, I'll do that." Then you do it and get a good piece of money and say, "Okay, that's it." Anything where it's a long period, I don't want nothing to do with it. I go to South America now and promote. A couple of years ago I went down to Caracas and promoted Holiday On Ice down there; and promotions for a month, two months or three months, I might do something like that; but outside of that, I don't want to work.

Parkinson: Jake Mills wants you to do something, and all that's current stuff, but it's not gonna happen.

Concello: Aw, Jake's been here twenty times to see me. He says, "Now we're going to do this and that." I says, "Jake, God damn it, quit kidding yourself, you're an old man,



Rudy Bundy, John North and Art Concello. Pfening Archives.

you S.O.B. Get out of here and don't be doing these things for too long. Now if I get a little show. . . ." When I went to Russia, I took. . . . Jake says, "Hey, I want to get away." I says, "Come on here to manage your show and watch everything. I'll come a couple of times, in and out, whatever." Now you watch it. So I took him to Russia. "You get anything let me know, now, G--D--- it, but as far as doing anything for long periods, I

don't want to do it. A short period thing, I'd fool around."

Parkinson: Let me ask a couple of things now in just summarizing. We've been over this year by year, and I'd like to ask you some generalizations now. You spent a long time in the top of the flying profession; you spent a long time in the top of circus management profession. In each of those, you know when you're thinking about what you're proudest of, what do you think was your greatest accomplishment? Are you proudest of the physical layout of the circus? Are you proudest of the triple? Are you proudest of owning all the acts on the show? Or what gives you the greatest pleasure now?

Concello: Oh, I don't know, Tom; I don't know. I was never too interested in flying. I did it for money, for the circus. Management, I seen more money. Owning a circus--strictly with me it was like going to the office, but you make money doing it.

Parkinson: So your greatest. . . . you just kind of happened into the flying as a youngster. (Yeah, yeah.) Then when you really got to make the choice yourself you were in the management end of it. So that kind of answers that kind of interest.

Now you have a lot of satisfaction out of knowing about the Concello seat wagons, you have a lot of satisfaction out of the indoor rigging, and seeing it. Now you know up in St. Pete they're hanging your stuff, and so on. Was any one of those developments the toughest, or the main one? How do you rank those things? Is there any emphasis you want to put on any of those?

Concello: No. Like I say, when I seen the situation with labor for the seat wagons, I said there's only one way they can do this is to let machines do it. And so, of course, when you get an idea and it nets you \$200,000, it's a good idea! Now the different things I developed for the circus, I didn't get anything out of the rest of them; just like the rigging, I just did that because I had a job there doing it and, of course, I got ten percent of North, which worked out nicely for me.

Parkinson: That reminds me in an indirect way of Dube again. At the time the show was really at its lowest



point, North induces you to come back and you're looking for a route. Now Harry had those ads in his book. He's going to have to kick back the ad money if he doesn't find a place to sell some books.

Concello: Yeah. That's exactly what I told him. I says, "Harry, if we can get this thing going now you gotta help. You're sitting here, I'm going to be busy the next year getting the physical end of this thing so it all meshes." I called Walter Brown in and says, "Walter, we need some dates." He says, "Hey, I can get you--Jeez, I don't know. Hershey and Providence and Boston." I think it was eight or ten of them.

Parkinson: Well, you've given me the answer there and that is that you reminded Harry that he's got to have some places to sell his book. And so suddenly he becomes an agent.

Concello: I says, "Harry, you got to do this paper work, the show's gotta get booked. Here's ten weeks." I think we were playing the Garden five or six weeks at that time. I says, "There's six weeks in the Garden, there's ten weeks there . . . now I know you ain't gonna get dates lined up so the jumps is good; do the best you can. Go to the coast." I had talked to Werner Buck, and I says (to Harry), "Go to the coast. Los Angeles' building is all right, and this is all right, and this is all right. The Cow Palace is all right, St. Louis is all right." So I laid out some routes of towns and said, "Now do the best you can. We're stuck, and unless you print a book next spring, you're going to have to give that money back. Now if you print the book, you can cover it over." He says, "I'll do anything! I'll do anything."

Parkinson: In that sequence, then, he decided one of the things he'd do would be to take it to Mexico.

Concello: Yeah. Well, we had a guy down in Mexico and I says, "Hell, you need four weeks. Go down there for a month, what the hell else can you do. We'll run the train down there and run it back." Well, the first time we went down there we made a buck. The second season he says, "Well, Jeez, let's play some of these other towns down there." I says, "Harry, I don't know." So he says, "Well, I ain't got no place to go. Dammit, I ain't got

no place to go." So I says, "Well, when we get around to that point, get six or seven of them." Well, about half of them was all right. Montevideo was all right, we played a bull ring for ten-twelve days, held it every day. Of course Mexico's got a bad situation, they make you sell so many tickets at a cheap price; it's a tough thing. So I said, "Well, if you ain't got no place to go, take it, as long as we get in there and get out of there and make the nut; now I ain't gonna lose any money." So I think we got in and out both; we made some money the first time, the second time I think we broke even, made a few dollars.

Parkinson: Okay. At that period, too, you were playing fairs; but circuses have never done very well at fairs. Are you filling in there, or what?

Concello: We took the fair because we didn't have no place to go. Now, wait a minute, the fairs I think we sold it for a flat fee. I think we played up there at that Toronto thing and got \$11,000 a day a run. There was an old duck in Pomona that was after me and after me, and I finally says, "Hey, get ten-eleven grand a day and go in and play it." So I think he raced there, and says, "Can you take that thing down so I can race in the afternoon?" I says, "Oh, hell, we can have it out of there in an hour." He says, "Good." Jack something. So we played from about . . . we was sitting in Lo s Angeles, so I think we played Pomona for twelve, fifteen, seventeen days, whatever the hell the run of the thing was, and got ten grand a day. I think we got \$10,000 a day and I says, "Harry, there's two weeks for you right there."

The Sparks ticket wagon in the Sarasota winter quarters. Pfening Archives.



Parkinson: At the time, though, you took those as fill ins; you really were shooting for the buildings?

Concello: Oh, Christ, yeah. I don't want to play outside. Nine times out of ten the promoters don't want to promote you outside either. God damn, you go in there and spend all your money on newspaper ads, radio and TV and everything, and then it rains you out.

They're stuck. Now the only one that I says I'll go along with is San Diego. About 99% of the time you can gamble that you ain't gonna get rain that time of the year, you ain't gonna get rain, so we played San Diego for years. But, outside of that. . . . Another thing, when we was doing this, a lot of these damn towns didn't have buildings in them. San Diego didn't have no arena when we was there. You take a lot of these towns, hell, there wasn't no buildings there.

Parkinson: What was your experience those first few years with the Shrine? You had run into a New Orleans and places like that. Were they a lot of trouble, exclusivity clauses?

Concello: You had some problems with the Shrine, except not too much. If you got around close to them, they were going to fight you.

Parkinson: Didn't you say those buildings wouldn't take another circus?

Concello: Well, Detroit was that way; but, hell, you went in the other building.

Parkinson: Is it true--(something about a promoter.)

Concello: I don't know. We had the Greek in Detroit, he said, "I'll promote you."

In the Olympia, see, and the Shrine is always at the fairgrounds in the Coliseum. Well, listen, you got to face the facts: the G--D--mayor, the district attorney, and every S.O.B. in town is a Shriner. It's hard to fight City Hall, that's all. There was a few of them around that it was hard to get in, but that's broke down now, you can get in damn near any place.

Parkinson: I'd like to turn now to a thing that points up on the remnants of the old Sparks Circus at winter quarters, but it has to do with the



trouble that the show had earlier, John Kelley and all, about income tax. Do you recall that the . . . Concello: I wasn't around there until 1931, now.

Parkinson: No, I know; but I'm talking about later. I'm talking about when John North got in control, 1938 and so on, and he settles the tax claim at that point, and there's some kind of a factor in the tax situation that goes back to the fact that those corporation shows still showed. He had some Sparks elephants; he had some Hagenbeck-Wallace stuff and so on. Am I correct in understanding that the federal government suggested that you get rid of the Sparks stuff?

Concello: No. They had some tax problems and finally they claimed that John Ringling owed about seven million dollars. Kelley did a lot of shenanigans, you know, and a lot of shenanigans went on. Now, anyway, this thing got to a point where the government says, "We got this firm, Hags Revis in New York, and we got another firm, Siegman and Siegman." Siegman and Siegman finally got this thing kicked around and finally they got to the point they were arguing about twenty and thirty year old things. So finally Siegman said, "Let's make [a deal]. So they settled John's thing for seven hundred thousand dollars. John said, "Now we want a clean bill of health to that point." To the point they settled.

Parkinson: We were talking about that federal tax thing. Siegman and Siegman got the clean slate, and then part of John's settlement in the 1938 period was. . .

Concello: . . . he finally settled that whole thing for seven hundred thousand dollars. Clean bill of health right up to date and says, "Hey, whatever's happened." So he paid them seven hundred grand, I think and that wiped everything out.

Parkinson: But you don't have any recollection of this thing on trying to get rid of the Sparks assets, or not claiming them, or not showing the assets from the other shows?

Concello: No. That was before my time, and John Kelley . . .

Parkinson: No, I'm talking about a later time, because the Sparks stuff was sitting in Sarasota.

Concello: Yeah. But all that stuff got burned up.

Parkinson: Yes. And that's part of it. I had always. . .

Concello: . . . And another thing is, a lot of elephants was sold on the coast. They claimed that the Sparks elephants were part of them.

Parkinson: Okay. In one of those periods, when the money was short, the show was selling some wardrobe and so on, they leased the Sparks title. . .

Concello: . . . They leased the Hagenbeck title there one time, I think while Gumpertz was there, they leased it. Hagenbeck Wallace, to a guy named [Edward] Arlington; and then Howard Y. Bary got mixed up in it somehow or other, and they leased it to them.

Parkinson: The time, though, that you were involved in it directly, I think Floyd King, and maybe some others, wanted to lease titles; and it never came off, of course.

Concello: I would never do it, and then old Floyd he wanted some stuff, he was doing something, so I think I sold him some stuff. I said, "For Christ's sake, here, go ahead and take it if it's gonna help you. You gonna get out?" He said, "Yeah, son, I'll get out." And I says, "Okay, Floyd." So I sold him some crap and then Chappie come down here and bought a little this and that, and I said, "All right, you want that car?"

Tito Gaona. Pfening Archives.

Parkinson: I was with him then.

Concello: "Well, then take it," I says. God damn wagons and a flat; I think he wanted that advertising car and some crap. I says, "Go ahead." He ain't there no more?

Parkinson: No. He's over at Orlando now, building this new thing for the Felds, which they're going to call Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus World--The Greatest Place on

Earth. So he's in Los Angeles right now. My wife and I are going over to Orlando to see him. We were scheduled to see him, I guess just his wife will be there now; but they want to show us the site, where they live and all that. So he's framing that thing now.

Concello: Good, if he gets some money.

Parkinson: Oh, I think he's in pretty good shape there; I don't know the details. Looking back on some other generalities. Who were some of the greats in circus business; in the flying business, as bosses, who were the really able people? Let's take flyers first.

Concello: I think Codona was as good as they come.

Parkinson: And present company excepted, of course. How about Gaonas? They're good.

Concello: The Gaona boy is a good boy. Antoinette was a good girl flyer.

Parkinson: She's still the only one that did the triple, I guess. Mayme was a woman catcher. What about the fellow with the Wards; oh, this was long before your time, but his reputation would have held over, about 1918, 1920's, somewhere in that period. He did triples.

Concello: Yeah. A guy called Ernie Blaine. He must have been very good, because I heard about him. Of course, he was gone before I ever got into the business.

Parkinson: What comments do you have about triples? Are they pretty tough? Is it like the four minute mile?

Concello: Yeah. You gotta do it just right, or you don't do it. There's only a split second when you get around there, if you ain't there, you're in the net. And it's a difficult trick. So this kid does it very good; the Gaona kid with the Ringling show now--Tito Gaona, he does it very good. Codona did it very good. Oh, there's been a few of them that did it very good.

Parkinson: What about this . . . I think it's one of the Valentines, a youngster maybe fifteen or something.

Concello: He don't look like anything; he's a midget and he's all right, but he catches him way up under the arms and it ain't like Tito or Codona, the way it was done. It ain't finished.





# Frank A. Robbins

## a most successful failure

### PART NINE

By Robert Sabia

**1906-it couldn't be better.** With a relatively successful 1905 season under his belt, Frank A. Robbins was eager to prepare for the oncoming year. His vision was to not only strengthen the performance but to ensure that there wasn't a recurrence of the justified criticism on the condition of his animals, particularly the draft horses. The show was tucked away at the Clifton, New Jersey, winter quarters immediately upon arrival from the closing date at Dover, Delaware, on October 19th. Continuing to make maximum use of the immediate family, his oldest son, Charles, was placed in charge of the quarters, and assisting him, was the second son, Frank Jr. Mr. Robbins' number one task was to secure an advance car to replace car #1.

The *Clipper* of November 4th advised that certain of the 1905 staff had already been retained for the new season. They included: John L. Glennan, treasurer; Charles W. Sprague, private secretary; William Goodwin, advance car Manager #1; Charles Coleman, advance car manager #2; and Dave Haley, contracting agent. The same issue of both *The Clipper* and the *Billboard* contained large, identical want ads for 1906. Mr. Robbins was seeking "SUPERIOR CIRCUS FEATURES of every kind and description. Artists of unusual ability in every line of refined, sensational and astounding endeavor on horseback, in the air, on the ground, and every conceivable shape suitable for proper presentation." He was also seeking bosses and workers for various departments, and more importantly, an equestrian director

who was capable of breaking horses and presenting some entirely newly trained animal acts. A good, active side show manager and announcer were required. Frank A. could be contacted at the 10 West 34th St., New York City address.

This being the beginning of a new season it was time for more financial magic. There exists a lease agreement between W. W. Cole and the Frank A. Robbins Company dated February 1, 1906, wherein the Robbins' organization was to have use of the 2 stocks, 6 flats, 1 advance car and 2 sleepers (Milton & Mattie) for the 1906 season (1 February-1 October 1906). The terms of the lease were that the Robbins' organization was to pay Mr. Cole for use of said

A typical Frank A. Robbins billstand around 1906. Pfening Archives.

property a total sum of \$4,000 in 5 monthly increments of \$800 each, commencing on 1 June and continuing on the first of each succeeding month. If this amount seems extraordinary, and it certainly should, as it equaled the total market value of these train cars, consider this--there was also a 6 percent interest charge. Obviously, Mr. Cole was once again lending the show \$4,000 to be secured by the train which really belongs to either Mr. Robbins, or Mr. Cooke, or the show itself. Why did the show require another loan of this amount of money? As we shall later see, the circus allegedly paid all of its debts of the 1905 season, including the very large amount of startup costs, except for an amount of approximately \$3,000. The show required some additional money to defray the winter quarters' expenses and get-away costs. This clever scheme was an excellent method to accomplish this while totally protecting Mr. Cole's interests. In addition, it is an off-the-balance sheet transaction, so if Mr. Robbins required any additional money he could go to any lending institution and present a balance sheet that essentially proved that it had substantial assets (the show property except for the train) that far exceeded the liabilities (\$3,000). Smart fellows these circus folks.

In an exchange of letters with William P. Hall, on January 30th Robbins requested a quote for 20 baggage horses to be used during the forthcoming season. He was seeking 7 to 9 years old, around 1,300 pounds,





with either gray or black coats. He was also looking for elephants. As a courtesy or perhaps a finder's fee, Frank A. advised that Frank Tate was interested in some flats and baggage wagons for a fire show that he was contemplating, which came out that season as the 22 car Talbot's Fighting the Flames. It is believed that this Frank Tate is the same gentleman that was a partner in the Carl Hagenbeck Circus, which made its debut in 1905. Fire shows were a short-term rage in the entertainment business. For instance, Forepaugh-Sells put out a fine courier in 1907 focused on its presentation entitled, "Fighting the Flames." Lastly, as a handwritten postscript, Robbins indicated that he could use an advertising car and two stocks if correctly priced.

Apparently Hall all had already responded with a positive offer regarding the horses even before he had received Robbins January 30th missive, because on February 6th, Robbins referred to a Hall letter dated January 28 and stated that he (Robbins) could receive the horses any time in March. He repeated his advertising car requirement and if he went out to Lancaster, Missouri, then there may be other items that the Robbins show would be interested in purchasing.

On the domestic front, there was a serious problem in development. In the *Clipper* of January 27th, it was reported that Frank A. Jr. was hovering between life and death having contacted a serious case of pneumonia. As nothing further was reported and Frank A. Jr. was very actively involved with the 1906 show, it is obvious that he was able to fully recover from this life-threatening malady.

In the March 10th *Billboard* Robbins appeared to take a major step to the big time when it was announced that William Ducrow, who was the equestrian director during Barnum & Bailey's European tour, would be acting in the same capacity for the Robbins Circus in 1906. Mr. Ducrow would also train a big horse number and a floral cart act. In actuality this did not happen as Mr. Ducrow returned to Barnum &



Robbins letterhead used in 1906. Circus World Museum collection.

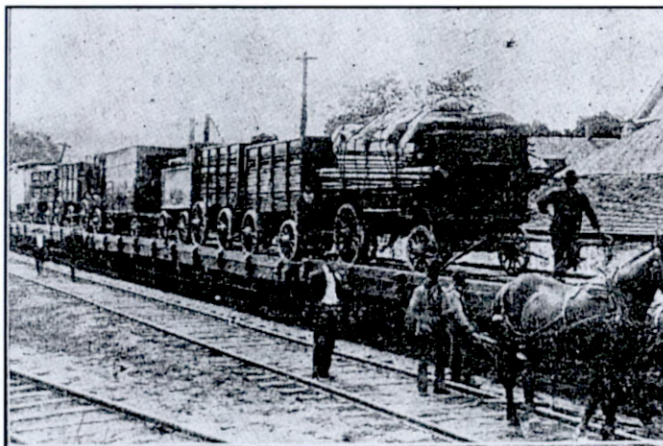
Bailey for 1906 and 1907 seasons, and Jack Cousins assumed this responsibility.

A roster set forth in the March 17th edition of the *Clipper* that included him reinforced the belief that Mr. Ducrow would be the equestrian director. In addition to Messrs. Robbins and Beckmann, the roster listed Charles Sprague, secretary (repeater); Frank A. Jr., assistant manager (new position); Charles Robbins, general superintendent (repeater); John Glennon, assistant treasurer (repeater); Mattie Robbins, manager of candy stands (repeater); Mrs. Charles Robbins, in charge of wardrobe; Winona Robbins, cashier, main stand (new position); Milton Robbins, reserved seat door tender (new position); Dave Haley, contracting agent (repeater); William Goodwin, manager advance car #1 (repeater); Thomas Van Osten, manager advance car #2; Harry Hodge, sideshow manager; Gennaro Maranzini, bandleader; Frenchy Haley, canvas boss; Whitey Likens, master of horses; Clint Graham, trainmaster; Steve Smith, sideshow canvas; Ike Smith, lighting; James Shipman, steward and in charge of the main door; and Oss Loftland, chef. As it can be plainly seen, while the advance crew was more or less the same, the trav-

eling bosses were in the main different. The largest loss was that of old-timer Lucius Foster, canvas boss. He had been with Mr. Robbins for two decades performing many functions in addition to being responsible for the canvas. They included parade boss, wagon builder, winter quarter's superintendent, lot superintendent and possibly more. What caused his departure is not known, but he may have retired or died. His loyalty and know-how could not be easily replaced.

On the performance side, Robbins had assembled a fine troupe. They included Jack and Pearl Cousins, principle riders (repeaters); Charles Watson and wife (equestrians); Alex. G. Lowande, clown rider; and his wife, Carrie Kemp, rolling globe; the three Herbert Brothers, acrobats; the Aerial Lloyds; the Elletts, trapeze (repeaters); the Kosters, human fly (repeaters); the Aerial Weavers, trapeze; Carlosa and Silverton, wire act; Edwin LaBelle; Vincent Harig, clown; the Belfords, acrobats and clowns; Girard Leon; and Joseph

Unloading the Robbins flat cars. Pfening Archives.





## OUR GENIAL MANAGERS

One would have to travel much and search the Circus world through and through to find two men who are better fitted to fill the position of manager than Mr. F. A. Robbins and his associate, Mr. Fred Beckman. In Mr. Robbins we have a man who is thoroughly conversant with every detail of the Circus business—a man who is affable, a gentleman popular with all, and, above all, a good showman. For 39 years Mr. Robbins has been identified with different amusement enterprises, the larger part of the time with his own shows. It was he that gave New York its first real Circus. He had a very successful season at the American Institute. His name in the New England States is a trade-mark for all that is good in the amusement line.

In Mr. Beckman we have that type of energetic young showman that is so rapidly coming to the front. His reputation as an Advance man is second to none. He has been connected with the Barnum & Bailey, Adam Forepaugh, and the Buffalo Bill shows. While he was generally found on the opposition car, his methods were always open and above board and such as to win the regard of his opponents. The first and the last on the lot, always with a cherry word for all, make him a fitting partner for Mr. Robbins. Two other gentlemen who are worthy of the name of Robbins are Mr. Robbins' two sons, Frank and Charles. These two young gentlemen have all the characteristics that have made their father famous. Energetic, industrious, and always ready to lend a helping hand, they are universal favorites. Some day no doubt they will be at the head of one of the big shows that will be a power in the Circus world.

### Staff

FRANK A. ROBBINS, *General Manager*.  
FRED BECKMAN, *General Agent and Treasurer*.  
CHARLES SPRAGUE, *Secretary*.  
GEORGE ROSS, *Legal Adjuster*.  
F. A. ROBBINS, JR., *Assistant Manager*.  
D. H. HALEY, *Contracting Agent*.  
ARTHUR DAVIS, *Press Agent*.

A page from the 1906 Robbins route book. Circus World Museum collection.

Marty and his wife. The side show included Margerite Stille, snake hypnotist; Frank J. Hurley, musical wonder; C. A. Bonney, magician; Harry Moulton, ventriloquist; Millie Lucretia, ladder of swords; L. E. Debonaire; Montana Jack and Maratina, impalement act; Soldene and Olivia; Harry Milo, strong man (repeater); and La Belle Cleo, oriental dancer. Many of the foregoing acts were pictured in the fine 16-page courier published for the 1906 season.

The *Billboard* of March 24th noted that Frank A. had just returned from a prospecting trip throughout Maine. Whether this was an attempt to mislead competition regarding the routing of the show during the forthcoming season, or perhaps the conditions found in Maine were not too promising, is not known. What we do know is Maine was not favored with the presence of the Robbins Circus in 1906. The short article went on to state that work in the winter quar-

ters was progressing splendidly. Additional painters were employed to decorate the new open dens recently purchased from Ferari (presumably the carnival king).

As the season opening was fast approaching, *Billboard* (4/21) contained a pithy note. It stated the show was about ready to depart for its opening date at Stapleton, Staten Island on April 25th. "The paraphernalia has been thoroughly overhauled, several new tableaux for the Tribunal of Nations (the spec's title) added, many new cages built and the menagerie materially enlarged. A lot of new draft horses have just arrived, also some ring stock and menage horses. The big new

calliope built especially by Nichols & Co., has just arrived. Jack Cousins will be equestrian director, instead of Wm. Ducrow, and Jake Hindman will be boss hostler. Since our roster last appeared in the *Billboard*, Belle Clark, Fred E. Runnels and the Great Gaspard have been engaged for the big show and Lillian Allen for the side show." It should be noted that the quarters in Clifton was about 12 miles from the Staten Island ferry slips in Bayonne. It is likely that the show was transported overland to the ferry slips over a couple of days, ferried across to Staten Island, landing directly at Stapleton or in the alternative, at Port Richmond, and hauled overland to Stapleton. The show played three dates on Staten Island, terminating at Port Richmond on April 27 and then ferried across the Kill Van Kull to its date at Bergen Point, New Jersey, (Bayonne) (4/28). Rather than being shipped by rail to its Monday date at Elizabeth, it may have loaded onto ferries again, to be trans-water shipped the couple of miles across

Newark Bay to that city. The train may have met the show in Elizabeth.

In any event, the show opened with a bang in Stapleton with turn-away crowds at both performances. The ease of transportation was greatly abetted by the addition of thirty-four head of gray baggage horses that were purchased from Deyan Carer. This may mean that the dealings with William Hall, previously mentioned, did not result in a purchase or that the Fiss purchase was in addition to the Hall horses. Business continued brisk at both Bayonne and Elizabeth, and Perth Amboy (5/1) provided sell-outs at both performances. Departure from Elizabeth was delayed until 4AM because of a serious injury to an intoxicated employee falling between two horses and being trampled. The show closer (Leonardo) leaping the gap delighted the night crowds. This act did not perform in the afternoon because of an accident to the bicycle during practice. The local press took particular note of the very comfortable reserve seating. The *Billboard* correspondent in Perth Amboy caught the performance and acclaimed it to be the best ever played in that city. He mentioned a whole host of acts being first-class and stated that the Aerial Floyds (four in number) are a special feature, giving one of the best casting acts he had ever witnessed. He noted the performance was in two rings, on a stage, and on the hippodrome track. He believed the show would make a barrel of money because it had the goods.

Heavy rain invaded the big top during the night performance at Westfield (5/2) dampening the spirits of the huddled masses. However, the show still drew well as it did the next day at Somerville. At Dover (5/4) the locals loved the colorful costumes and rated the show highly. The week closed at Plainfield where business was just fine.

Following its previous year's success story the show crossed the Hudson on Sunday and played the large city of Yonkers, New York, the next day (5/7). There the local police captain insisted that the hoochee-coochee dancers perform only moral activities and nothing to the contrary



would be tolerated. The show's representative drew back in horror at such a thought (viz.; immoral dancing). In addition to dancing restrictions gambling was also prohibited. The show's personnel were loud in their praise of the wonderful attitude manifested by the entire police force. It seems that in many communities, such activities go on and the local authorities never think of insisting they be eliminated. Not so in Yonkers with its ever vigilant men in blue. No nonsense in this city along the Hudson, just a few miles south of the next stand, Ossining, better known as Sing Sing, where there isn't much nonsense either.

White Plains (5/10) enjoyed big crowds. But en route to the stand at New Rochelle, two employees had their skulls crushed by a bridge. They were apparently standing on a stock car with their backs to the train's direction when they encountered the bridge understructure, which in turn caused them to tumble onto a following flat car. They were not discovered until the train reached New Rochelle. Excellent attendance was experienced at this locale and the performance was greatly enjoyed. There was an added feature during the evening show when a lashing holding the big top to a center pole snapped causing the bale ring to slide down the pole until it encountered a gasoline torch.

The canvas caught on fire, frightening the crowd. Several hundred made a mad dash toward the entrance, injuring a number of them in the process. The fire was quickly extinguished, the band played on, and the performance resumed. Shortly thereafter, a burning rope reignited the canvas, causing another rush to the exits. This time the local fire department was summoned but to no end because the circus employees had already put out this blaze as well. The performance was not resumed. In retrospect, the fires were not so serious as they appeared and the total damage was less than \$50. The event was headlined at the next day's stand in Mount Vernon. The paper stated that the stories abounding regarding the fire were greatly exaggerated. The damaged canvas was replaced at Mount

Vernon. The paper went on to say that the show looked larger than the previous year. The parade was started a bit earlier than usual and was a fine one. Rack Mount Vernon up as a big plus in business had.

Continuing on the repeat of the 1905 route, Robbins opened the following week at Port Chester (5/14), almost at the Connecticut border on the Long Island Sound. The good business prevailed as it did for the rest of the week in the Connecticut spots of Stamford, South Norwalk, Ansonia, Naugatuck and Torrington. At Stamford, canvasman, Alexander Smith was operated on at the local hospital for blood poisoning of the hand. This malady was the result of an accidental self-inflicted shooting wound incurred the previous week when loading a pistol. The infection was arrested in the nick of time and Mr. Smith could anticipate a lifetime of loading pistols with both hands. At Norwalk, the parade was reported to have "two large bands, a Scotch bagpiper, a farmer (?), several clowns, two elephants, a monstrous camel with two humps, a polar bear, a black bear, tigers, leopards and many other animals too large and fierce to have the coverings of their cages drawn while out on parade.

There were also bareback riders and cute little ponies, besides the sonorous steam calliope." In Ansonia, attendance was gauged to be over 7,000. Most of the public liked the performance but there were rumblings that the billing inaccurately described the program. Many of the advertised features did not take place at all. The circus was loaded and on its way on its short jump to Naugatuck shortly after midnight.

The next week was also spent in

## CHRONICLE OF EVENTS

MONDAY, April 30.

Banner day for the side show; home of Frank Hurley, who is a big success.

NEW ROCHELLE, NEW YORK, May 11.

The breaking of the bail ring caused the chandeliers to fall on No. 1 pole, causing the lamp to explode. A perfect system for which Mr. Robbins is famous was here evidenced, for while the flames were soaring toward the top of the tent and igniting the tent, there was no confusion, as every man seemed to know just what to do. The audience left their seats in an orderly manner—in fact, the larger part remained to witness the conclusion of the performance.

The damage was slight, and the next morning the Big Top went up without a trace of the fire being noticeable.

WORCESTER, SATURDAY, June 9.

Strong opposition with Walter L. Maine. Business big at both performances.

WOODSVILLE, N. H., FRIDAY, June 22.

A baby girl was born to Mr. and Mrs. Belford in the car Milton. A purse was raised around the show for the new arrival.

SARATOGA, NEW YORK, TUESDAY, July 17.

Twenty-five thousand Hibernians in town. The town is draped in green. Big business at night. Everybody swells up on spring water.

ARKVILLE, NEW YORK, MONDAY, July 23.

Smelts have their first outing. The frying of the fish could be smelt for miles around. Outing a big success as usual. Henry is the Fall Guy.

LONG BRANCH, N. J., THURSDAY, July 26.

The four hundred of the show spread themselves here. All we can hear around the dressing-room is society gossip.

A page from the 1906 Robbins route book. Circus World Museum collection.

Connecticut with positive results. On May 23rd in Meriden, a lad of 19 was found lying helpless on the lot where the circus exhibited the previous day. He claimed he was abandoned by the circus because he no longer could work due to rheumatism contracted when sleeping on a flat car in the clothes on his back. He had worked on a farm near Yonkers and joined the Show as a broncho man when it played there. He was paid \$3.50 per week with 5 cents being withheld for the porter, a gentleman whom he never saw. He had four horses in his care and was expected to do other work as well. For four nights he had one of the bunks that are located in the horse cars right above the hind quarters of the steeds. However he was not in the bunks the other night when they broke and the occupants were dumped onto the backs of the horses that, of course, panicked. Fortunately there were no serious



In the June 21st issue of the *Clipper*, an updated roster of the Frank A. Robbins New All Feature Shows was published. Significant dif-

On June 13th the circus entered Vermont at Brattleboro and played for a full month in that state and New Hampshire. The tour followed the Connecticut River crossing back and forth until almost reaching the Canadian border at Colebrook, New Hampshire (6/25), and again at Newport, Vermont (6/30). The circus proceeded generally west gaining St. Albans (7/3) on the shore of Lake Champlain, before heading southerly, eventually working its way out of the state the following week. Business was said to

best. The various acts were well performed and better-trained horses do not exist. The horses alone were worth the price of admission. The extended tour of Yankeeland closed

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out at Bennington, Vermont (7/12), which is located very close to the New York/Massachusetts border. Fine business and high performance marks were recorded there.

After the initial New York State date at Granville (7/13), the show was routed 25 miles west to the resort community of Glen Falls where good crowds were pleased by the performance. Similar results were had at the spa town of Saratoga, particularly in the evening. The town population and general tourist trade were increased by 25,000 Hibernians who were gathered for their annual festivities. The color green adorned every conceivable location to the good cheer of all. In fact, maybe too much cheer. At least as it applied to the Robbins' rail crew. It seems that the last wagon loaded wasn't chocked correctly. When the engine jarred the train as it coupled, the wagon's rear two wheels rolled off the flat car.

It took some time before the wagon was placed correctly and the train was able to proceed to its next stand, Cobleskill (7/18), 65 miles to the southwest. The show arrived there around 8:30 A.M., much to the disappointment of many young lads who had anticipated the arrival before dawn. It seems the Five Tasmanian Troupe had already joined the Show by then as they received mention in the local press. As always, the Herzog stallions and Mlle. Clark, menage rider, were subject to special praise. Not so praiseworthy perhaps were the actions of the Robbins roustabouts who, during the night performance, attempted to relocate some of the occupants of the bleacher seats to the unoccupied reserve seats. What was normally an acceptable practice, turned into a serious confrontation. Unpleasantries were exchanged and certain of the patrons refused to move whereupon the straw boss drew up a large wagon in front of the patrons blocking their view of the performance. The patrons then moved to the reserve seat section, but not with a great amount of happiness. Other than this, it was a good day at Cobleskill.

Still awaiting the Baseball's Hall of Fame, Cooperstown was a pleasant resort community at the southern end of Lake Otsego. On July 19th,

1906, the Frank A. Robbins Circus visited there which should ensure the town's immortality even if baseball had no future. Lots of locals attended both performances and enjoyed it. Frank A. Jr., who apparent-

ly had not fully recovered from a bout of pneumonia, was resident in nearby Richfield for a few days. He had previously been at Newport, which as we will recall, was the home village of the first Mrs. Robbins. Who ever is Mrs. Robbins, notwithstanding, the show continued in a southerly direction, visiting Onecota (7/20). There the *Daily Star* thought it significant to mention that the evening performance was essentially duplicative as the afternoons and all of it well done. Arkville followed and then a big mid-week jump of over 90 miles was made to Newburgh (7/24) on the western banks of the Hudson River. At this stand good business was had and the locals enjoyed the day immensely. The Newburgh *Daily Journal* mentioned that the Tasmanian troupe consisted of three women and a boy. Their acrobatics were little short of remarkable and received a deluge of applause from a very appreciative audience.

The show took another long mid-week jump to visit a few New Jersey shore communities which were then in the peak of the tourist season. The initial stop was at Keyport. There Frank A. introduced a half page ad which contained a number of photographs of the performers, not unlike his heralds which he used the previous year and would continue to use throughout the remainder of his circus career. Unlike the heralds, most of the photos were not identified as to person. It is suspected that the bandwagon shown was not the Frank A. Robbins' bandwagon. Never-the-less the ad is spectacular and was sure to garner much attention from the towners. Long Branch, Asbury Park



Unloading the Robbins horse cars. Pfening Archives.

and Toms River rounded out the week. Attendance was good at all dates with Toms River packing the tents in the evening having 4,000 appreciative souls in the seats. The local paper provided a strong positive review but noted that the only thing that was really new was a vendor selling post cards of the circus. Some of these post cards survive to this day.

The circus was routed over Sunday to Long Island, one of Mr. Robbins fondest haunts. This two-week tour commenced at Flushing, near the present day LaGuardia Airport. There were high expectations for good business. In fact, in a letter dated July 23rd, W. W. Cole wrote to Robbins saying their mutual friend, Mr. Cooke, was doing better in his enterprise and was encouraged about this turn of events. He noted that he would visit the show in Flushing and believed that Long Island was "fresh" and crowded with vacationers. He anticipated a string of good dates were to be had. Coincidentally *Variety* suddenly discovered the circus business and for the next few years provided insights that the two other trade papers either didn't know or chose not to report. In the July 26th issue, *Variety* gave a short review of the 1906 season to date. As regards to Frank Robbins, it stated that he started out two years ago and was able at the conclusion of last summer to pay off every dollar of indebtedness with the exception of some \$3,000, leaving him absolute owner of his enterprise. At this time, he does not owe a dollar and is about

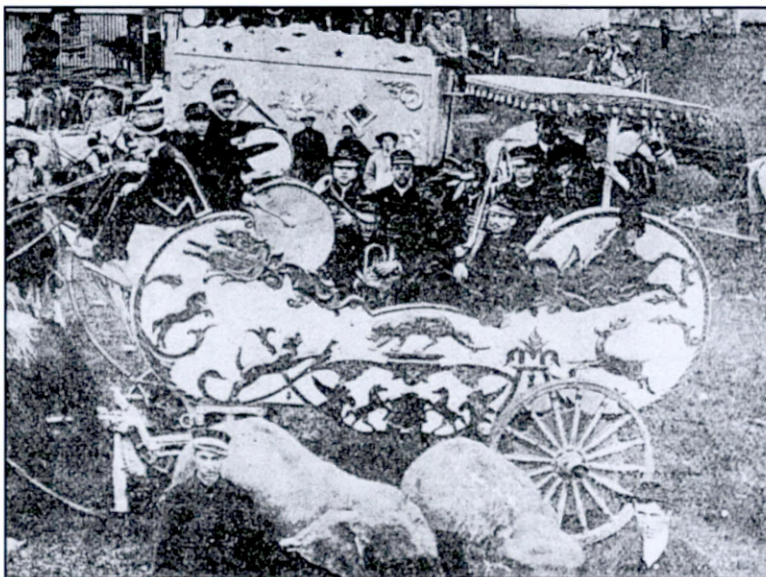


\$22,000 to the good." Without the actual books, it is impossible to vouch for the accuracy of this impressive financial report but having an idea of the level of business experienced, such a good picture is not surprising.

The business on Long Island seemed to meet the optimistic expectations. The Brooklyn *Times* reported that at Flushing, many of Societies Four Hundred were in attendance. The next day, one local mistakenly took the train to Huntington, when in fact he meant to go to Glen Cove (7/31) to see the Circus. He hired a taxi that cost him \$6 to take him to the correct town and after an hour drive got there in time to see the evening performance. Now that gentleman was a real circus buff. Something very special took place the next day at Oyster Bay. President Teddy Roosevelt's family, Secretary of State Loeb and his wife, the Presidents staff, and the Associated Press representative who followed the President to the summer capitol in that resort town attended the afternoon performance en masse.

The word was that they all enjoyed the program. Although not specially known, it is doubtful if the canvasmen pulled a wagon in front of this body and started to load the bleacher seats.

Although rain greeted the show at Huntington (8/2), good houses were had at both performances. However, the parade was cut short with only a couple of cages and the steam calliope making the march. The waterproof canvas wasn't and many in the audience sat under their umbrellas watching the acts. A fine review at Sag Harbor (8/6) was supported by the big business at the ticket wagon. Mentioned was the clown with the trained pig as being particularly delightful. The show journeyed to the southern fork at Southampton (8/7) before turning about toward New York City. The tour ended on a somewhat sour note at Far Rockaway



The Frank A. Robbins bandwagon and two small elephants. Pfening Archives.

(8/11) when during the evening performance in a crowded tent, a section of the seating collapsed injuring many of the spectators. As nothing further was mentioned in the trade papers, it is believed that the injuries sustained were not of a serious nature and claims emanating there from were probably settled on the spot.

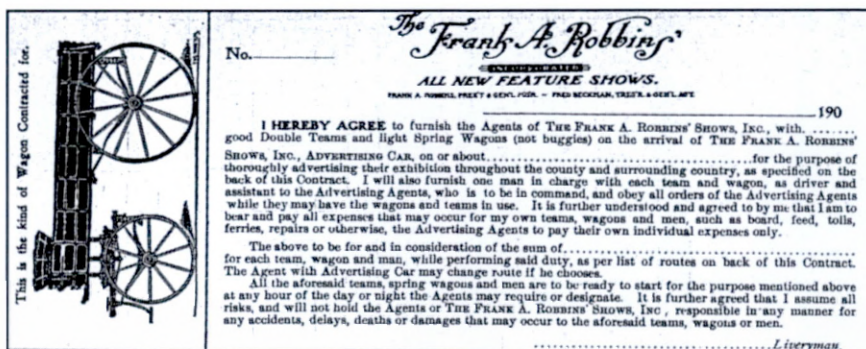
Leaving the New York City metropolitan area, the circus traveled over 100 miles to reach Catskill, (8/13), located on the western bank of the Hudson, probably crossing the River at the Poughkeepsie railroad bridge. The next day at Canajoharie the resident newspaper commented if the performance was good enough for the President's family it was certainly good enough for the locals and it seems that the locals agreed. It was then to Herkimer before climbing north into the Adirondacks visiting the resort communities of Tupper Lake (8/17) and Saranac Lake (8/18). The show turned south to Prospect (8/20) and Rome, then entered the Finger Lakes region at Seneca Falls (8/22). On the way to Rome a draw bar pulled out and the train was halted to effect repairs. As a result there was a late arrival and the parade was canceled. However, Leonardo performed the free act of Leaping-the-Gap, which must have drawn the crowds because there was a full tent at both performances. The

Rome *Sentinel* provided a detailed review of some of the acts thereby giving us a good idea of how these acts were performed at the turn of the century. "(T)he tight wire work of Amy Tasma the iron jawed woman was excellent.

In her stunt of being drawn to the top of the tent by holding to a rope with her teeth was shown her wonderful strength. At the high elevation she swung in a circle for several minutes, the rapidity of her revolutions making it almost impossible to recognize a human body. Another good act was that of Miss La Wonda on a large globe. With her feet she propelled it up a steep incline to the apex, stopping it there to do a skirt dance and jump the rope, afterward descending the incline. La Wonda on the bounding rope is a star performer. This somersault act drew the applause of the audience. Carlosa and Silverton are also wire artists, the latter jumping over a table thirty inches high and maintaining her balance on the wire. There remained for the Tasmanian quartet in ground troubling to do an act never seen here before. Two of the party with a third lying horizontal with feet on the head of one and head on the head of the other, lowered themselves to the floor of the platform and then regained their upright position without the human crossbar losing its balance. The six handsome chestnut stallions of Prof. Herzog are rightfully put forth as a star feature. Without a word of command or cracking to whip they give a 15-minute performance. Not only as a body do they go through a drill but close their act by each horse individually doing some stunt different from that of its predecessor.

The last feature was that of the aerial Lloyds. Four in number they an exhibition of trapeze and bar act the top of the tent that is unsurpassed by any of the so-called big shows. There were over 30 acts given





on the platform and two rings and in none of them is there anything to offend the most fastidious person" The circus played out the week at Seneca Falls, Geneva, Dundee and Corning (8/25). The route book stated that the afternoon show was lost at Seneca Falls while the local newspaper commented that there were big houses at both afternoon and evening performances. The author of the route book may have been referring to the late arrival at Rome the day previous but according to the newspaper the show gave two performances there as well although not as well attended. At Geneva a strange circumstance evolved wherein the circus had to pay for two show lots. It seems that the contracting agent rented one lot for \$25 with the proviso that if the circus did not use it only a single dollar would be owed. Later the show contracted for another lot. The owner of the initial lot came to the show grounds (not his lot) and after presenting his contract was paid in full. Shortly thereafter, the owner of the actual show grounds came by and presented his contract, which after some investigation was paid in full. The show's management swore a warrant for the initial owner but he could not be found. The management advised the local police that they would pursue this matter, as it wasn't right to cheat people. As we shall see, these self-righteous show officials were blessed with a short memory.

It may have been a coincidence but the first significant newspaper review regarding swindling took place at the very next date, Wellsboro, Pennsylvania (8/27). It being a Monday date, the parade got off at its scheduled time of 9:45 a. m. to appreciative towners who were lining the streets of the march. Just before the afternoon performance the

A livery contract used by the Robbins circus. Circus World Museum collection.

skies opened up and thoroughly drenched the patrons. Nevertheless they filled the big top and were not disappointed in any way with the excellent performance. This registry was duplicated in the evening. Meanwhile in the sideshow tent the slicky boys were operating with a vengeance. The shell game removed much of the wealth of the locals. Even small boys were permitted to donate their financial resources to the cause. Losses of \$10 to \$50 were reported and the circus personnel probably did not sustain such losses. The next day the circus moved 20 miles north to Westfield. It was the largest circus that played this village in years. Yet the local reviewer found the performance lacking, not in the number of acts but their quality. None were considered marvelous but all in all it was fairly priced at 50 cents. One extremely objectionable activity was gambling taking place in the annex.

In addition to the shell game, there was a punch wheel with the only one being punched is the player. The paper recalled that when Robbins last played Westfield (1891), the swindlers were arrested and made to cough over all of their illegal takes. They made up for this loss this time with interest. Coming in from Austin (8/30) to Cross Forks (8/31), the trains sustained two separate derailments but no damage was incurred other than the late arrival. Continuing to work westerly, the Show crossed the border to complete the week with a date at Wellsville, New York (9/1).

Regarding the gambling and cheating the locals, a long time side show personage, David Lano, dis-

cussed his experiences while on the Robbins show in 1906, in his autobiography entitled *A Wandering Showman, I*. "We (David and his wife Mazie) asked our agent to book us somewhere else, so he sent us upstate to Catskill (8/13) to join the side show of the Frank A. Robbins Circus, of which Harry Hodges, an old friend of ours, was manager. This was about the autumn of 1907 (sic). The Robbins outfit was a racket show. Knobby Clark had charge. His wife, Belle (Clark) rode in the circus. He did the adjusting. 'Brooklyn Frank' Murphy was a gamester with the show. Harry Houck ran the big-mitt game. A married couple handled the strong jewelry. We had an uneventful season that ended prematurely one morning when we found ourselves sidetracked at the show's winter quarters." With reference to the premature closing of the show, it would appear that Mr. Lano was in error.

The press releases over a week before the season close date discussed when it was to be. As to the Robbins circus being a racket show, unfortunately Mr. Lano's recollections were accurate. According to the route book, David Lano was a side show ticket seller and Mazie Lano had her Dog and Monkey Circus as a concert feature.

During this period heavy competition from Barnum & Bailey and Cummins Wild West was experienced. Although The Greatest Show On Earth was in the general area for only about a week, its wide-ranging billing crews were found in the same small locales that were on the Robbins' route. The Main lead Cummins outfit provided more head-to-head competition. Both shows had their affect on Robbins' business. The Robbins' tour continued to crisscross the New York/Pennsylvania border, ever in a west/northwest direction, playing Clouderport (9/3) to good business to appreciative audiences, before reaching the Buffalo suburb of East Aurora (9/7). It then turned south to pick up a Saturday date in Franklinville, New York (9/8).

It left New York State for good, returning to Pennsylvania at Kane (9/10) near the center of the state.



The next day at Brookville, the huge camel amazed the locals. So inspired, they filled the big top in the evening and thoroughly enjoyed the performance. The show gradually drifted to the southwest toward the greater Pittsburgh area where



Two of the Robbins stock cars. Circus World Museum collection.

Barnum & Bailey had just visited for a couple of dates. Nevertheless, Robbins scheduled New Kensington (9/15) and Charleroi (9/17). The latter stand to OK biz. It's not wise to fool with neither Mother Nature nor Mother Barnum for that matter. While Barnum & Bailey headed into West Virginia and Kentucky, Robbins bid them good riddance and started to work toward the southeast. It had a good day at Scottdale (9/20) with a very large evening crowd following a fair matinee.

This was followed by another big day at Somerset. The train did not arrive in Somerset until 9:15 A.M. and the first wagon did not reach the lot until 9:45. Such was the esprit de corps that the circus was all up and ready shortly after 11. Although not mentioned, the parade was probably canceled. The towners considered the show to be the best and cleanest that ever visited that town. Meyersdale (9/22) closed out the week. Earlier in Meyersdale, the second ad car was on a siding when a passing freight sideswiped it, smashing windows and causing other superficial damage. None was injured as almost all of its personnel were out billing the town. Heavy rains greatly interfered with business. The parade was considered very poor and the performance only fair. The exception was the Herzog troupe of horses, which were rated wonderful. Gambling was widespread and did better business than the performance. Regarding the parade, it may be that it was significantly curtailed because of the heavy rains, only a token presentation. Otherwise the reviewer's comments don't make sense.

Ever a glutton for punishment, the circus was routed back to the Pittsburgh area where Barnum & Bailey's footprints still could be seen in the half frozen earth. Good

er and attendance blessed the show at Washington (9/24). After six more dates in this played over region, Frank A. finally exited Pennsylvania at Braddock (10/1) where it played to very pleased audiences. It then headed south into West Virginia opening at Morgantown (10/2). The weather began to play an important factor on business. It gets mighty cold in them hills. At Belington (10/6), high winds blew down the cook tent and made it impossible to erect the big top. A pouring rain made the prospects dismal and the date was blown (literally). Three days later at Parsons, the cold weather and heavy rain caused only one performance to few people. They did not even bother to unload the train the next day at Davis (10/11). Why would one when there was a howling snowstorm taking place. Robbins dipped into Cumberland, Maryland (11/13), for a welcome day of good business and weather. The circus folks probably sighed a breath of frozen relief when exiting West Virginia for good at Martinsburg (10/16) where it enjoyed another fine day of business.

The familiar town of Winchester (10/17) marked the initial stand in Virginia. The show played at the fairgrounds during the run of the Winchester Fair. The price of admission to the circus entitled the purchaser to go to the fair as well. As described in the Winchester *Evening Star*, "... at noon today there were probably several thousand people at the fair grounds, who were shivering and shaking under the influence of a gray, drizzly (sic) autumn day. Nothing could have been dearer that the scene presented today at the big Winchester Fair. A fine rain had been falling nearly all-night and kept up.

Hundreds of people swarmed to the fair from all points of the compass and in every conceivable method. Some footed it from the mountainside; four mules drew some cam in automobiles and one team, in which there were

twenty persons. These got scared by the elephants of the circus and for a while caused the liveliest excitement on North Market Street." Robbins did well in Winchester, certainly better than the fair, which was saddled with more and heavier rains throughout its run. They drew a full one in the afternoon and a much smaller house at night when it was downright cold. The attendees considered the circus to be excellent. One seventeen year old girl considered the circus to be so good that she ran off with it to be with her showman whom she met that day. Robbins personnel had a knack of making a lasting impression of towners.

Although Robbins escaped the rains at Winchester by leaving there, the same weather was awaiting it at the next stand at Strasburg. It again was raining so hard that only one performance was given. Brunswick, Maryland (10/19), Alexandria, Virginia (10/20), and Annapolis, Maryland (10/22), all turned with mixed results. Brunswick was OK but at Alexandria the train was held up in the Washington railroad yards and a late arrival resulted. Cancellation of the parade caused disappointment to many locals. Rain did not help business either. It was a damp miserable day at Annapolis, which caused many of the country folks to stay home. Poor attendance was in order at night although the afternoon was much better attended.

The *Evening Capital* wrote a detailed review of the performance which can be summed up by one word--Wonderful. The paper noted that Mr. Robbins was in New York on business and in his absence; Mr. Beckmann was manning the helm. The paper also carried another article, which discussed the circus life from a woman's perspective. Mrs. Pearl Cousins, wife of the equestrian



director, Jack Cousins was interviewed. She stated that the circus had been in rain or worse for fifteen consecutive days. The weather condition had negatively affected the costumes. She discussed living out of a trunk was alright once one got use to it but living in wet cloths has had its problems. Mud, mud, mud, everything was covered with mud. When asked where they would be tomorrow, a nearly performer asked where were they today. "In Annapolis," she commented in surprise. She wondered how might people live in this town. When advised around ten thousand, she expressed amazement. I thought only a couple of hundred. "Why you don't even have street cars!" She was told as she was leaving the dressing tent to present her act that Annapolis didn't have street cars because they would spoil its high class streets and besides, you know all classes must ride on plebeian street cars and there are no reserved seats either.

The back of the 1906 Robbins herald. Pfening Archives,

Again as the season slowly came to an end, Robbins routed the circus into Delmarvar picking up Middletown, Delaware (10/24), as the starting gate. Two large crowds greeted the show at Chestertown, Maryland the next day. Two Delaware dates followed. Cambridge, Maryland (10/29), was good at both performances in cold weather. Again the locals loved the program of acts. Finally, it was home sweet home after the closing date at Easton Maryland (11/1). A new winter quarters was awaiting the arrival of the circus train, which was to be the permanent quarters for the next number of years, Jersey City.

However, the season was not over for all. In the September 22nd *Billboard*, Robbins advertised for circus acts for a southern tour circus to commence November 1st. As it actually evolved, this circus called

Robbins Brothers Shows was a two-car affair managed by Frank A. Jr. Again Mr. Lano's book, *A Wandering Showman, I*, provides a brief glimpse into that equally brief tour. "Frank A. Robbins, Jr., and Frank Murphy organized a two-car show to go south. They offered us (David and Mazie) a job and, because the weather was getting colder, we went along. The show was weak both in its advance work and its performance; the colder weather followed us southward. Trees were frozen as far south as

Plant City, Florida, that year. We quit in White Springs, Florida by the show went on and its people were broke and hungry in Tallahassee. I heard afterward that some of the performers killed a pet goat---a valuable trained animal---belonging to an elderly German and roasted it for Christmas dinner. The German ate some of the animal without knowing what it was, and when he found out he cried in front of all the company." I guess one has to rack this venture into the "Nice Try" column.

But what about the season past for Frank A. Sr. It may be recalled that in the latter part of July *Variety* reported that the circus was about \$22K ahead, a considerable amount of money. Our analysis of the business reported at the various stands to that date seems to confirm such a figure. Much of the remaining tour during the summer months appeared to be good, holding or probably increasing the \$22K profit margin.

Then as autumn approached, competition from Barnum & Bailey in the greater Pittsburgh area probably impacted the bottom line. Matters became worse when severe weather was experienced in West Virginia

causing loss of dates and/or performances. Fifteen days of consecutive rain certainly affected the gross and net, but to what extent we don't actually know. However, it is generally assumed that the 1906 season was a successful one for the show. But juxtaposition this notion with the following paragraph from *Variety* (2/23/07). "Frank A. Robbins' show, wintering at Jersey City, will open its season the latter part of April. It had a good deal of bad luck last year, but the show has been entirely refitted and is going out again under excellent auspices, with extensive backing of outside investors." What bad luck? It couldn't be the weather because anyone who would venture into the high West Virginia hills in October is taking a great weather risk. Actually the weather was quite good for most of the season. There were no serious train incidents, fires or injuries, which had been reported and no lost performances until late August. Most of our business reports come from local sources and not the press agent's releases. What are we missing here? We know that the 1906 season was not a good one for many important circuses. Although *Variety* reported that Ringling cleared \$800K, its rival Barnum & Bailey struggled by with only \$100K.

The latter show may have been plagued by the same weather challenges that affected Robbins. Actually Barnum & Bailey lost three consecutive days because of rain and mud in October and five out of eight schedule dates. So it may be the weather that *Variety* is referring. On the other hand, we already know that Cummins Wild West was a financial disaster. The Carl Hagenbeck Circus was said to have lost over \$220K, the Great Wallace Circus was also a loser, and the Sells-Floto Circus seemed to have failed its financial objectives. Was the circus business just bad in 1906, particularly in the northeast? Maybe! Lastly, if the Frank A. Robbins' season was a reasonable success, say clearing \$10K, why did it need "extensive backing of outside investors." Best guess upon reflection: the show broke even in 1906 so it wasn't much better off than at the start of the season. It wasn't so easy after all.

**FRANK A. ROBBINS**  
NEW GREATEST  
TRIP OF THE NATION

**BUY YOUR AMUSEMENTS INTELLIGENTLY**

Look at the Other Column and put down in this what other Shows give you for Your Money

100 PERFORMERS AND MUSICIANS
6 THE CASTELLO Family
7 THE GREAT ORTONS
4 HERBERT BROS.
2 THE LEONS
2 THE MOREYS
RAY & LEE, Comedians
3 THE MIACO FAMILY
2 THE CARROLS
10 FUNNY CLOWNS
16 ROSE LIGLE BALLETT
24 CARMELLI VASSILI
A Host of Others
50-ACTS-50
ALL FEATURES



# Side Lights On The Circus Business

## PART NINETEEN

By David W. Watt

*Editor's note. The dates listed are the days the article appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Gazette.*

**December 12, 1914**

When I come to look back to the days when I first joined the great Forepaugh show and we showed in all the large cities, the one great wonder to me was where do they come from and where do they get the money? Boxes sold and not occupied, ten thousand in full dress, and while we were entertainers and in the entertaining business, I never will forget the first night's business in Madison Square Garden, New York City.

When I was told to close my window, for every seat in the building was taken, I went in and took a look at the thousands of people in full dress. It was a sight worth seeing, and especially to a countryman like me; for this was my first appearance in a box office in New York. And while I was a part of the entertainment, yet I doubt if anyone was being entertained any better than I was, for it was all new to me, and every day I was seeing many new and wonderful sights. Although I was in the business, I was certainly getting as much out of it as the people that were paying their money.

Although I put in many years of the best part of my life in the business and went through many hardships, when I look back it seems like a short pleasure trip, as it gave me a chance to meet many notable people and was an ideal way to study human nature.

It was then that I met many warm friends both in the business and out, and for the most part they

were friends that [I] never forgot. One of these is no less a personage than the widow of the late Adam Forepaugh, who is now Mrs. Walter S. Nagle of Philadelphia. Mrs. Forepaugh was never away from the show, was always with her husband, helping him count up the tickets after each performance, and by her many kind deeds endeared herself to everyone about the show. All the time the people were entering the show, both afternoon and evening, Mrs. Forepaugh could be found at the main entrance sitting beside her husband, who was always there looking after the business.

The early Madison Square Garden in New York. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.



Any time when Mr. Forepaugh would get excited and everything would seem to be going wrong, it was Molly, as she was known about the show, that would always smooth the troubled waters.

Many times she would act as a go-between when people had differences that they could not seem to settle themselves. She would invariably come to the front and almost invariably settle matters satisfactory to both sides.

Although she was Mr. Forepaugh's second wife, and much younger than he, and came to the show a perfect stranger, it was not long until the new mistress was looked upon as the white wings peace; and this, too, was from the management of the show down to the working men, everybody was her friend. There never was an accident in which any of the workingmen around the show was hurt, but what Molly was the first one to come to their aid. And her friends were simply numbered by the thousands that from year to year traveled with the show and knew her best.

Although I have been out and away from the business 24 years, she is the one of all others that did not forget; for every few weeks we get a letter from her and are always remembered by her on Christmas.

Last week the "Peg O' My Heart" company, who were playing in Chicago, took a day off and gave two performances at Joliet, where more than 1,600 prisoners were treated to that beautiful play. When it was announced that the company would have a special train over the Rock Island for Joliet and



the entire company would leave Chicago at a certain time, there were hundreds of prominent people in Chicago who were anxious to make the trip with the troupe. Prominent men and women and different clubs begged to be allowed to make the trip and witness the performance with the prisoners. But this was impossible for there was scarcely enough room in the hall for the prisoners themselves.

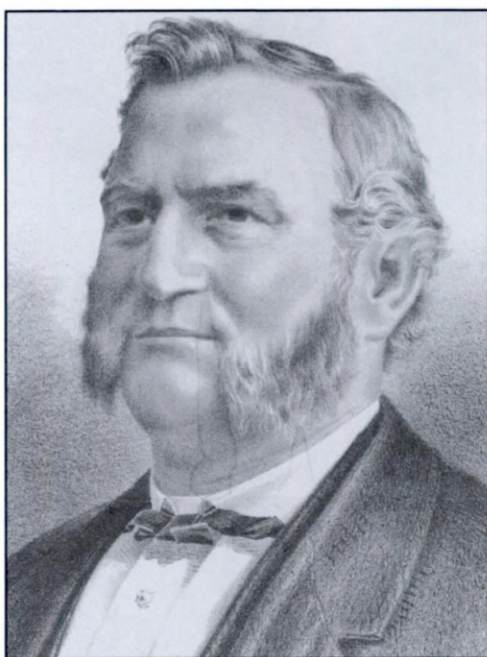
For weeks before the performance was given, many of the prisoners were busy building a big stage and arranging the electric lights, so that everything might be given in exactly the same way and order as it was in Chicago.

This instance brings me back to the Burr Robbins show in '79, when we showed in Waupun in this state. In the afternoon the Warden came around and asked Mr. Robbins if he could not take his people to the prison right after the afternoon show and give a performance there for the prisoners. Mr. Robbins said: "I am [a] busy man, and have too much to look after already. But you and Mr. Watt talk the matter over and any arrangements you may make with him will be satisfactory."

I immediately told him that at 4:30 I would be at the prison with all the ground acts and the concert people that it was possible for me to get, and give as good a show as was possible. In making the parade in the morning, the prison gates were thrown open and the parade passed through the yards of the prison where all the prisoners had a chance to see it. At the performance in the prison in the afternoon there was certainly one appreciative audience.

At the close, the Warden said to me: "This has certainly been a treat for the boys, and I always try to give them some entertainment or other as often as possible."

Probably there were many men there that this was the first circus and the last one for them. And I have often since thought that if I was ever connected with a show again I would surely see that the state prisons of the country had some kind of an entertainment whenever we showed in their town, for this would surely go a long way in helping to brighten up their life.



Adam Forepaugh, a great American showman.

#### December 19, 1914

When a boy of 16, I went to work in a grocery store in Monroe, Wis., owned by two brothers by the name of Hodge. At that time there were five Hodges in Monroe, four of which bore the name of William. Everybody knew them by "Big Bill," "Little Bill," "Old Bill" and "Young Bill."

Shortly after I came to Janesville, "Big Bill," for whom I worked, left Green County for southwestern Kansas and for many years I lost all track of my old employer. "Big Bill," as he was known, was a great smoker and always used a clay pipe, and the darker the color and the stronger the pipe the better he liked it. It was some twenty-two or three years later with the Forepaugh show that we showed in the town where "Big Bill" had lived for many years and had amassed a fortune.

We Sunday'd over in this town and showed there Monday, but I had no idea of ever meeting him again. On Monday morning I went into a bank to try and get some Chicago or New York exchange for silver; and when I spoke to the teller he simply shook his head and said: "Nothing doing. We have more silver than we can handle."

While I stood there talking with the teller for a few minutes, I happened to look back in the bank where

four or five men were talking and there I spied "Big Bill" Hodge, smoking away apparently on the same old pipe that he had used in Monroe. I asked the teller if that was "Big Bill" Hodge sitting back with those gentlemen, and he promptly replied: "No, sir. That is Mr. Hodge, president of the bank."

I quickly said, "Not for me. I have known him longer than you have and I never heard him called Mr. Hodge before. Will you please call him to the window?"

Mr. Hodge came, but he did not recognize me and I said to him "I have been trying to get some Chicago or New York exchange from your teller here but he refused me and I told him I would like to speak with the president of the bank. For there is nothing like going to headquarters when you have business to attend to."

Hod was very nice to me and while he said he was president of the bank, he never had taken any active interest in the work, and if the teller could not accommodate me, he thought that would be final. I then asked him if that was the same pipe he had brought west from Monroe with him, and he smiled and took a look at me and said: "What do you know about Monroe?"

I told him that I had lived there when quite a boy, and recollected all of the Hodges. He then asked me what I did in Monroe and I told him that my first work was in a grocery store for "Big Bill" Hodge. He grabbed me by the hand and, calling the teller, gave him orders to accommodate me with all the Chicago and New York exchange that he possibly could, and if there was any expense to charge it to him.

At the Hodge homestead at 5:30 o'clock that night all the family and a few invited guests, of whom I was the honored one, sat around to the dinner, which together with the visiting lasted until almost time for me to open the ticket wagon for the evening show. My old employer stayed with me that night and visited over old times until the train was all loaded and ready to pull out for the next town.

"Big Bill" Hodge stood about six foot four, and a better hearted man I



never knew. This was only another instance of meeting old friends unexpectedly.

J. W. Layden, assistant superintendent of the Northwestern road, with headquarters at Baraboo, was en Janesville on Wednesday to attend the funeral of William Cantillon, and by chance I happened to meet him; and although I had forgotten him, he remembered me, for he had charge of the train that carried the Burr Robbins show over the northern part of the state in 1881.

Mr. Layden related an instance that happened to the show on the road running into Viroqua. This run was made on Sunday, for the reason that there was a heavy grade to make where only one car at a time could be taken up. Mr. Layden and I worked together there most of the time Sunday, and as it was the first circus train he had ever had charge of, he remembered it well.

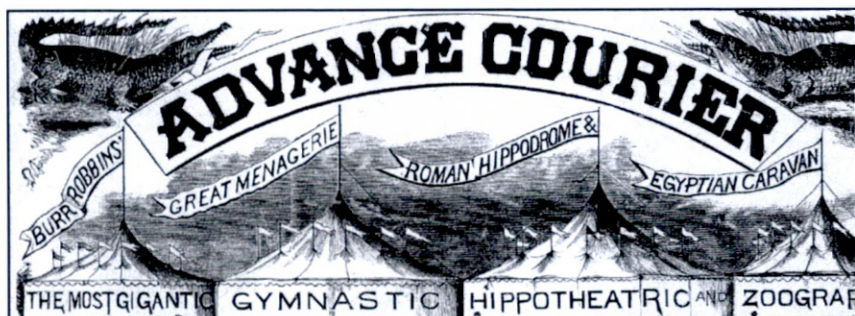
He said: "You recollect, Dave, on Monday night Ex-Governor Jerry Rusk stayed with us on the lot until the last wagon had left, and then we were his guests at a midnight lunch?"

Viroqua was Mr. Rusk's home and when we sat around the lunch table Mr. Rusk told the waiter that that had been the hardest night he had ever put in show business.

"Do you know," he said, "it was just 12 o'clock when I took the last wagon off the lot?"

Mr. Rusk thought this was a great joke, for the waiters seemed to take it all in and never realized that the old ex-governor was joking. And instances like these made an impression on Mr. Layden that he did not forget.

Word came a few days ago that Frank James, the noted bandit of 40 years ago was lying on his death bed at the old homestead in Missouri, about nine miles southwest of Excelsior Springs. It was on this farm that the James boys were raised prior to the Civil War. Frank James [was] now 73 years old. After his death there will be only one of that famous band left, which is Cole Younger, who served something like 25 years in the Minnesota state prison. And he for many years has been living



Heading used on a Burr Robbins courier in the 1880s.

quietly at Ue's Summit, Mo.

In the early 80's we showed at Nevada, Mo., which at that time was Frank James' home, where he was employed as a clerk in a grocery store. For some reason Frank did not work in the store on Monday, and in the afternoon he and his wife came to the show. Mr. Forepaugh visited with them for quite a time in the reserve seats; and when it was time for them to go, he brought them over to the ticket wagon and introduced them to me. They both seemed to be interested in the way the big circus was run. At that time we had a newspaperman with the show by the name of Mart Young. Mart would occasionally drink a little too much and sometimes it would last him for two or three days. This had to be one of his days and along in the evening Mr. Young took a roll of paper under his arm, sharpened several lead pencils at both ends, and made his way to the Frank James home, where he insisted on writing the career of his life. They were living quietly there in a modest way to try and live down and forget the past, and about nine o'clock in the evening, a young man came to the ticket wagon and said that Mr. Young was down at the Frank James house and they wanted someone to go and get him.



I was delegated by Mr. Forepaugh to go and get Mart, and when I rapped at the door a small woman with a kindly face and a smile opened the door and recognized me. She asked me to come in. We visited for something like half an hour. Both Frank James and his wife asked me many questions of the show and as to where I made my home in the winter; and when I took my friend Young and bade them good-bye, it was with the firm conviction that I would certainly make a poor detective, especially if I would be expected to run around and locate a desperate character. For Frank James was certainly one of the last ones that I would expect to be a desperate man, and his quiet wife seemed to have nothing on her mind except to look after his welfare, and never during my visit was there any mention made of Frank James' past career. After many escapades in many different states, he had for many years lived quietly on the old farm, which they occupied more than 50 years ago. It is in this country where they had many sympathizers and warm friends.

#### December 26, 1914

For many years back I have been meeting a man from Evansville by the name of Bullard, and while I knew he was one of the Bullards of Evansville, I did not know that this man had ever been an old troupier with the circus. He looked to me like many other people that I knew in the country, and that I had traveled with him back in the 70's with the Burr Robbins show never entered my mind. A few days ago Mr. Bullard came to Janesville and spoke to me and told me that he had been following my articles closely, and espe-



cially those of the Burr Robbins show; for he said: "You and I put in a season together with Burr Robbins when the show went by wagon."

This was all news to me, for it had gone from my mind that Adelbert Bullard and I had ever traveled together. Mr. Bullard was a big team driver and left winter quarters at Spring Brook, I think, the first season that the show went out from their new winter quarters there, and for a season or two was assistant boss hostler to Spencer Alexander, better known there as Delavan.

Mr. Bullard and I found a warm comer where we visited over old times and he recalled many incidents that happened in '78, which was my first season in the business and Mr. Bullard's last.

After the closing of the season in 1878, Mr. Bullard made up his mind that this work was not to his liking, so far as making a life's work of it, and quit the business and a short time after married and settled down on a farm.

Adelbert Bullard now owns a fine farm of 100 acres, two miles southwest of Evansville, and says he has nothing to regret for quitting circus business when he did. For a time after he quit the business, when things did not go just right, he would sometimes think that he would like to go back.

"For," he said, "I have always kept track of the different shows and especially when I would hear of someone that I knew in the business. And for some years I thought that you had forgotten me, and the many dark rainy nights that we put in together over the roads through the far west with the wagon show; and I sometimes think that if I started in the business later, after the shows were all going by rail and where the hardships were not so great, that possibly I might still have been in the business."

Mr. Bullard is 62 years old and would readily pass for a man of 45, so that the hardships he had encountered in the '70's with the wagon show did not seem to count against him. It is old timers like these, as they are called in the business, that I am always glad to meet and visit

over the days of yesterday.

It is a well-known fact around all big circuses that the hardest work is in the side show. For it is there that their work commences as soon as the parade returns to the show grounds and many times lasts until the show is out at night. The barker goes through the side show lecturing on the different freaks anywhere from 15 to 30 times a day, and if the business is big, they have but little time even to go to their meals.

One of the most interesting articles on side show life was written a short time ago and published in the theatrical and circus journal by William J. Hilliard: The inside of the side show is without any question the most democratic place on earth. There is no distinction, no reserved places, just an intermingling of all that goes to make up this population of a community. Rich man, poor man, beggar, thief meet here on terms of quality, and if it is a good opening, the tent is soon packed and jammed with the most heterogeneous audience ever assembled. What a study to look over that sea of faces! It different from the theatre stage, for here one is right among them, almost

also no dancing girls.

They are a little disgusted and bewildered, perhaps, to think that there is no way for them to lose their money, but home at night they all agree that it was the cleanest show that ever came to these parts.

A remarkable thing about the side show is that its drawing power has not been impaired by the moving picture or ten-cent vaudeville, and, as a matter of fact, our price of admission has been raised from ten to fifteen cents the last two years.

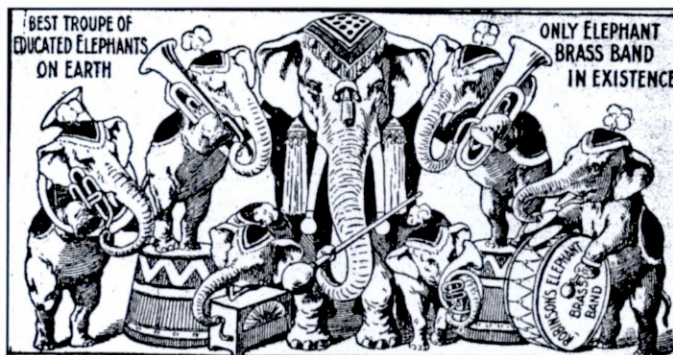
The personnel of the side show remain practically the same as it was in its incipency--midgets, giants, skeletons, fat men or women, etc. A snake charmer is as necessary as the lurid paintings of banners are out in front. And the question she is asked: "You keep them on ice, don't you?" "Their teeth are pulled out aren't they?" "I wouldn't touch one of those horrid things for worlds."

Acts have been tried in side shows, but the public is in a hurry and freaks interest them most. Mere are, however, one or two acts that can hold a side show audience, such as sword swallowing, etc. In my own personal opinion Princess Wee Wee, the little colored woman, is the best freak attraction in American today, both in her entertaining and drawing powers.

It is somewhat a difficult task to write of the peculiarities of the freaks for the reason that, having been with them in such close proximity for years, one loses one's sense of perspective and becomes so used to their idiosyncrasies that particularly interesting things they do and say frequently pass unnoticed.

Some of them, particularly midgets, are highly intelligent and possess a keen sense of humor, as witness Capt. Jack Barnett's reply to the lady who asked him, 'if he was always so small as that.' 'No,' replied Jack, without as much as a smile, "I used to be as big as the professor, but I got married and settled down."

The lecturing on the different attractions has changed somewhat since the old days when "Sunday School Smith" or "Old Hutchinson"



catching their whispered criticism. And, strange as it may seem, the better class, the better dressed, the more intelligent, pay the most attention to the lecturer, and, stranger still, believe he [what] utters, whether he makes the giant two feet taller than he really is, or the fat boy weigh two hundred pounds more than he does.

The others are skeptics. They are continually expecting to be stung by somebody or something around the circus, especially in the side show. Some, I really believe, go looking for it. "Where are the games, gol darn it?" am asked me nearly every day. I tell them that we have no games and





Jo Jo the dog-faced boy. Circus World Museum collection.

could talk on a fat boy for thirty minutes. "Brevity is the soul of wit," and we have adapted ourselves accordingly.

Many well known names appear in the list of those who have presided over the destinies of the inside of the side show and lectured on the freaks since Mr. Barnum woke up one bright morning and decided that America wanted him to start a circus. Frank Uffner, who discovered Lucia Zarette and Jo Jo, the dog faced boy; 'Sunday School Smith,' Hager and Henshaw; George Arlington, who managed Taloo and the original Aztecs; Frank Morris, Old Hutchinson, Doc Langdon, Charlie Bell, Jim McNulty, etc.

Taking care of the inside of the side show of today has its perplexities and troubles galore. The inside man must be something of a diplomat. Freaks are human, only more so than most people; they make friends and enemies among themselves and are very pronounced in their likes and dislikes.

The midget will fall out with the giant and they won't speak for weeks; the fat lady becomes disgusted with the man with the phenomenal memory, who, by the way, often forgets to put his collar on or comb

his hair. Then again, the side show manager of today, such as Clyde Ingalls, believes in incessant ballyhooing. Every streetcar that approaches the lot, brings out the snake charmer just as she was about to be introduced and people had been waiting a while to see her perform. Then, again, the colored band plays almost without cessation all day long. And [yet with] lecturing, dodging the band and ballyhoos, climbing up and down ladders, JoJo jostling through the crowd, answering during the day hundreds of questions, mostly foolish, I have never yet felt that I needed to carry a hammock or a reclining chair.

One point that I wish to impress upon the reader is the genuineness of the freak department. The sideshow and the circus business in general have long since outlived the reputed statement of Mr. Barnum that the American public liked to be humbugged.

Mr. Bailey and successors, the Ringling Brothers, have certainly [not] believed his words, for perhaps in no other branch of show business have such stupendous efforts been made to please the public. The side show attractions are obtained and chosen with as much care as the acts for the big show. The genuine character of the attraction presented in the side show has done much to correct the erroneous impression that this department of the circus has anything to do with fakes or humbug.

Of course there



Barnum's Aztec children. Circus World Museum collection.

is a phase of human nature that believes nothing and "knockers" will always live.

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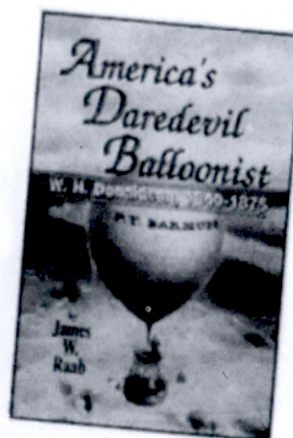
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